

A sleeker you

Looking to target stubborn fatty deposits? Lipolysis may be the answer.
By Nicole Sparrow

Human nature is such that all of us have something about our bodies we'd like to fix. While part of having a healthy body image is to accept that none of us is perfect, and that it's our flaws that make us interesting, there's no doubt that many people really do feel that fixing trouble zones will improve their self-esteem.

For some, that's a tummy tuck, for others it's filling out lines around their mouths. Others still want to target stubborn fatty deposits like that frustrating muffin top or those embarrassing 'bingo wings' no bicep curls will eradicate. Or perhaps you'd just like sleeker ankles or inner thighs.

Liposuction remains one of the most popular cosmetic surgery procedures, but there's no denying that it's hugely

invasive. While surgeons continue to improve their technique and find ways to inflict fewer traumas on the body during this procedure, it still takes its toll.

In the same way many patients are opting for less invasive anti-ageing procedures like Botox or filler injections to delay invasive surgical options like a face or brow lift, body treatments are following the same trend, and one of these is lipolysis.

As the experts at Melrose Aesthetic Clinic in Johannesburg explain, lipolysis is a gentle, non-surgical method of removing accumulated fat deposits in specific regions on the body. An article in a 2006 edition of the *Aesthetic Surgery Journal* suggests that lipolysis can be used to refine the abdomen, flanks, double chin, back and 'bra rolls', outer and inner thigh, saggy

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jowls, neck, and even the knees (although some areas respond better to treatment than others). The study looked at over 17 000 people who have undergone this procedure.

What is lipolysis?

Lipolysis involves injecting a fat-dissolving substance into the localised regions of the body, explain the experts at Melrose Aesthetic Clinic. The active ingredient is lecithin, in particular a substance called phosphatidyl choline (PPC). You've probably come across lecithin before and there are actually different types. Your body produces a form in your liver and its function is to emulsify large fat particles and turn them into smaller ones, aiding in their digestion. In fact, if you struggle with digesting fat, UK nutritional expert Patrick Holford recommends you take a lecithin supplement to help you along.

Lecithin is also present in numerous foods, but the most commercially available source comes from soya.

It's also used extensively as an emulsifier in processed foods such as chocolate, where it's added to keep the cocoa and cocoa butter from separating. Granted, processed foods are generally full of sugar, salt and other additives and devoid of much nutrition, so they're not an ideal source.

You're better off opting for egg yolk, liver, peanuts, corn, spinach and whole grains or even margarine for a healthier source of PPC.

What happens?

When it comes to lipolysis treatments, soy lecithin is used. As Dr Riekie Smit from Vivacité clinic in Pretoria explains, 5ml of product per area is injected into various spots using specialised mesotherapy needles. This seemingly small quantity is actually enough to dissolve all fat in an 80 square centimetre area in three to five sessions, Smit adds, although she does explain that you may need anything from 5ml to 50ml of product, which will affect the cost.

Each doctor who does the procedure seems to find their own system that works best for their patients. As with much related to the human body, one size doesn't fit all. The Melrose Aesthetic Clinic reckons you should see permanent results within one to three treatments, depending on your expectations.

Dr Smit has found that results are visible from four weeks, but in particular after the second or third session, although she suggests a patient may need up to four to eight treatments. She has also found better results when the treatment combines PPC with deoxycholate. This substance breaks down the fat cell membrane, which then allows the PPC easier access to dissolve the fat cell contents. The

by-products are then excreted by the liver and kidneys.

Dr Maureen Allem from Skin Renewal clinic in Johannesburg and Cape Town prefers to give lower doses of PPC per treatment, as the effects are cumulative.

It's all about talking to your physician during your first consultation to find out what they feel will work best for you.

Does it hurt?

The Melrose Aesthetic Centre terms this a gentle procedure. Compared to liposuction which involves placing a patient under anaesthetic, inserting vacuum suction tools under the skin to suck out fatty tissue, plus post-operative drains to remove accumulating fluids, a hospital stay and other side-effects like bruising, medication to prevent infection and so on, then yes it is gentle.

However, it's important to understand that because you're using multiple injections, it's certainly not going to be pain-free. "Light swelling, redness and a burning sensation may be experienced at the targeted areas for one to four days. Light bruises will disappear within a week," explains the centre.

Dr Allem has found that one way of reducing the side-effects is to use tripolar radiofrequency on the site directly after the procedure. It can cut down the swelling time to two to three days and promotes better distribution of PPC in the treated area, she says.

What can I expect?

The number of centimetres you lose will depend on your unique physiology, so it's important to discuss your expectations with your doctor.

Research published in the *Aesthetic Surgery Journal* found that some areas responded better to treatment than others. Best results are seen on the abdomen, flanks and double chin. The least responsive areas were found to be the inner and outer thighs and knees.

There are some people who won't be able to have this treatment: it's not suitable if you're pregnant or breastfeeding; if you have an acute illness or your immune system is compromised; if you are on anticoagulant therapy or chemotherapy; if you're allergic to soya; and lastly, it's not recommended if you are obese.

The good news is that the results are permanent, as long as you don't gain any weight, (the same as with liposuction), explains Smit.

As that old saying goes, no pain, no gain, but it might be worth it in the long run, if it means that flatter tum puts a spring in your step. ●