



SMOOTH

A new cutting-edge laser treatment claims to radically reduce the appearance of cellulite in one session. **Vanessa Martinez** says, Beam me up

Photograph by Bill Diodato



A '30s vintage, silk charmeuse, bias-cut gown in a shade of cool celadon. I happened upon it in a dusty back room of a Cambridge thrift store as a teenager, tucked furtively between natty flannels and fur-collared coats. Slipped over the head, the delicate silk clung longingly to my body, highlighting every slope and curve. Back then, I didn't think twice about the notion of a dress that leaves as little to the imagination as a sheet of cellophane swathed around my figure. Fast-forward over a decade: While I'd always assumed that my bottom would eventually return to its infant-like (dimpled!) state, I wasn't prepared for the bumpy terrain on my thighs.

Like most of us afflicted souls, I've slathered on creams, gels, and oils with cellulite-fighting promises, hoping that the formulas might live up to the labels' lofty promises. I've vigorously

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dry-brushed and massaged until my skin was as red as a poison-ivy-induced rash, and spent a week hoofing around in shoes that promised to tone away those superfluous fleshy bits while I walked. I've been hooked up to endermologie machines, swaddled in mineral-rich seaweed, and whipped with birch branches in a (public) steam room, all in the name of dimple eradication, and all to no avail, spending a small fortune along the way. So when I heard about an innovative new laser treatment delivering promising long-term results, I was intrigued, to say the least.

While it seems nowadays that there is a laser for every skin condition, none has addressed cellulite with any success. What separates Cellulaze is its approach: The laser works beneath the skin rather than on top of it, and the high-tech SideLight 3-D optical fiber splits in two, meaning more thorough penetration of the affected area. Explains Dr. Bruce Katz, the NYC dermatologist involved in Cellulaze's clinical trials (at press time, the treatment was in the final stages of FDA approval): "With a typical laser, the energy comes out of the tip of the fiber and shoots right ahead, but with this new technology, for the first time, you can break the laser beam into two parts, with 40 percent of the energy going straight out, and 60 percent up in a right angle. Because we thread the laser fiber under the surface of the skin, we can shoot it up at the dermis and turn it sideways so the laser has more reach." Katz likens cellulite to a mattress, with its dimples and raised areas; the laser works by pulling down the fibers between the fat cells and melting the fat that causes those raised bumps.

The thought of a laser being inserted beneath my skin was terrifying, but Katz promised that the incisions are so minute they don't even require stitches, and because the targeted area would be numbed by a mild local anesthesia, I wouldn't feel a thing. Also, unlike most other cellulite-focused treatments, this would require just one single visit (for about \$3,000) for—wait for it—permanent results. I could get thighs like Gisele's forever! I was in.

First up was the consultation, wherein the good doctor examined my dimpled gams and mapped out a course of action. "You really don't have much cellulite at all," Katz said, while kneeling and examining my legs and backside at eye level under

some seriously unflattering lighting (think dressing room meets dentist's chair). He must say that to all the girls. And though he was unimpressed by my quantity of cellulite, he remained certain that Cellulaze could effectively remove what I did have. A week later, I arrived ready to be lit up. The first order of business was photographing and marking the affected area—a horrifying, albeit brief, ordeal that involved chronicling every bump no matter how teeny with a black Sharpie—and then an antinausea pill, a mild muscle relaxant, and an antianxiety pill (the former to prevent any adverse effects from the latter two). In no time, I was lying facedown on the treatment table, my eyes shielded with glasses from the powerful laser light. I was injected with a local anesthesia to numb the area, which was, really, the only uncomfortable part of the entire procedure. In fact, I was so unbothered by the laser beams being transmitted by the slender handheld wand slowly zapping away at my cellulite that I fell fast asleep for the remainder of the treatment. Even the device's low buzzing was weirdly soothing. OK, the muscle relaxant and the fact that I was utterly exhausted after a brutal workweek definitely helped, too. About 25 minutes later, Katz tapped my shoulder to awaken me from my drooling slumber. My two incisions, which looked like tiny vampire bites, were then wrapped in gauze, and I was helped into my posttreatment garment and sent on my way with a goody bag of bandages and more gauze.

Now about that garment . . . The figure-strangling, thick Lycra bike shorts with zippered and latched sides that stretched from my rib cage to the tops of my knees had to be worn for a week nonstop (even while sleeping; showering was my only respite) underneath my clothing to prevent swelling. Did I mention it was crotchless? Not attractive—for me or my horror-struck boyfriend, who, until then, had never conceived of the idea that something crotchless could be so simultaneously unsexy. The first day after the treatment was spent couch-bound, in throbbing pain that came on in waves; I hurt, and not just because I was stuck in the world's most unattractive underwear. I was sore, black and blue, bleeding—be prepared to change the dressing every few hours for the first two days, and if you're squeamish, enlist help because it can be a bit gory—and the mild painkiller Katz had prescribed didn't help much. But I gave myself the day to recover, and by the next morning, I began to feel that I'd simply attended back-to-back Spinning classes. (In fact, you are not permitted to exercise for a week, which wasn't so tough.)

During my follow-up appointment two weeks later, Katz was pleased with his handiwork and—even under those harsh fluorescent lights in his office—so was I. The formerly rugged terrain of my thighs was tightened, smoothed, and nearly gone. I'd already noticed a difference in the way my clothing fit—my rail-straight jeans were on a less bumpy path, and I didn't feel the need to top off my form-hugging dresses with a long, loose layer. And, according to Katz, the results would continue to look better over the subsequent months; his first round of patients remains cellulite-free more than a year later. With a new bounce in my step, I headed home and straight to my closet with one goal in mind: to retrieve a certain charmeuse frock from its dusty back-corner perch. I slipped it over my head, and while gravity has taken its toll on other parts of my body since college, the silk clinging to my thighs hung smoothly. And that made it all—yes, even that wretched, man-repelling garment I had to wear post-laser—totally worth it. **mc**