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The cellulite fight

What works and what doesn't in the battle against stubborn fat By Beth Janes

The newest laser: VelaSmooth

How it works The device, made by Syneron, features massage and infrared energy, as TriActive does, and adds radio frequency (RF) energy. That combo heats skin more than infrared alone, increasing the tightening of bands and collagen and the breaking up of fat cells, says Dr. Alster, who once served (unpaid) on Syneron's medical advisory board. Some derms say the extra heat improves your chance—and degree—of smoothing compared with the TriActive laser. During treatment you may feel a warm sensation and mild pinching. Afterward, redness can last about an hour.

How well it works Eight treatments (twice a week for a month) smoothed dimples and improved skin texture by an average of 50 percent in 18 of 20 participants, according to Dr. Alster's

study, published in the *Journal of Cosmetic Laser Therapy*. After six months and no maintenance, only some dimpling returned. VelaSmooth shows slightly better results than TriActive, says Dr. Goldberg, who has done studies for Syneron and is a consultant for Cynosure, TriActive's maker. But in the only study pitting thigh against thigh, the difference was statistically insignificant, says Dr. Goldman, who coauthored the research. (He has done studies for both companies and uses TriActive in his practice.)

What do women say? "It contoured my thighs and tightened the skin; my pants fit better, and my skin looked and felt smoother," says Victoria Duke, 43, of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She had a series of 15 treatments over six weeks. Others SELF interviewed had a similar experience. Duke had mild redness after the first few sessions and says her results are mostly unchanged despite having no treatments for six months.

Bottom line As with TriActive, you're not guaranteed a better backside, and simply going for one or two treatments won't be adequate. But many derms familiar with lasers agree that VelaSmooth is the top FDA-cleared option because of the added RF energy. An initial series costs about \$1,800, and maintenance averages \$200 per visit. Annual cost: \$2,700.

People say that dimples come from being kissed by an angel. Dimples on your *other* cheeks, and thighs, however, are a more devilish sort. About 85 percent of women (and virtually no men) have cellulite; it strikes gymgoers and couch potatoes alike. And there's no cure. What causes it? No one knows for sure, but many doctors say circulation under skin slows (perhaps due to hormones), which swells fat cells. The elastic collagen bands that usually hold down the fat then overstretch or weaken from the extra stress, allowing fat to pop up in between the bands and push on the underside of skin. Voilà—a cottage cheese effect, says Tina Alster, M.D., clinical professor of dermatology at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. (File under unfair: Men's connective bands interlock and stay strong.)

So far in the battle against cellulite, nothing works permanently or 100 percent or for every person. Only treatments that temporarily reduce the *appearance* of cellulite are available. They're expensive, it can take several sessions to see partial smoothing, and then you need maintenance appointments every month or few months to keep your rear from regressing. If you're very overweight and inactive, results are so subtle that you're better off with an exercise plan first, derms say. But if you're active and need to do something (anything!) about cellulite, this guide gives you the current options, plus a look at what's on the horizon. You'll hear from experts (many of whom have consulted for manufacturers, connections we've disclosed) and women who've tried the regimens about what to expect to help you get the smoothest possible butt for your buck.

