

THE ULTIMATE FAT BURNER?

Surely one of the most universally held female fantasies—barring anything to do with George Clooney—is losing inches from your waist without dieting, exercise, or surgery. (Actually, forget Clooney: Men may come and go, but the desire for flat abs is eternal.) Now that fantasy may have just become a reality. Even usually skeptical doctors are excited about the latest weapon du jour, a revolutionary treatment called Vanquish.

"I've seen a lot of fat-removal techniques," says David McDaniel, a leading researcher and an assistant professor of clinical dermatology at Eastern Virginia Medical School, who has been conducting an independent study on Vanquish. "Some procedures are painful or take too long; some are effective only on small areas of body fat that can be sucked up through a small vacuum. Vanquish addresses all those problems. It can treat a large surface area uniformly. It's fast, efficient, and comfortable," he says, adding, "I've been doing this for 30 years, and most advances have been little baby steps. This is a big technological breakthrough."

Vanquish, which is due to arrive in an elite corps of doctor's offices this month, uses radio frequency waves to target fat cells, heating them up enough to cause cell death without damaging skin or muscle. The treatment is noninvasive—the applicator is suspended over the abdomen about an inch above the skin—there is no downtime, and it's relatively inexpensive. (Prices range from \$450 to \$800 for a 30-minute session; four sessions are recommended.) Patients feel a warming sensation but no pain. The biggest risk may be a hot spot, usually caused by the radio frequency waves landing close to a bone. If this occurs, a technician merely has to readjust the applicator. While the device was cleared by the FDA earlier this year for deep-tissue heating, which can be used for muscle recovery and healing, it is still being studied for body contouring. (The FDA is awaiting further results before giving Vanquish the seal of approval for fat reduction.) Recent research on animals has found that Vanquish killed 60 percent of the fat cells treated with it. A subsequent study done in Prague on people with love handles showed that results were visible within two weeks. After eight weeks the average loss in waist circumference was 2.23 inches.

Although Vanquish hasn't been around long enough for longitudinal studies, researchers believe that because of cell death, the fat loss will prove permanent. "This new technique is a real game changer—it's the safest, easiest way yet to remove fat," says Robert Weiss, an associate professor of dermatology at Johns Hopkins Hospital and the lead researcher of the aforementioned animal study. "As the panels heat up, the radio frequency waves they transmit differentiate between fat cells (which are denser and hold less water) and skin and muscle cells," he explains. "The heat causes cell death in the fat cells; some die instantly, some in a matter of weeks." The dead cells are filtered through the

*A new high-tech treatment claims to
(quickly, painlessly) whittle your
waist and flatten your tummy.
Emily Listfield investigates.*

*Photograph by
Victor Demarchelier*

lymphatic system, metabolized in the liver, and excreted in the urine. "I've seen patients lose several inches after four treatments without changing their diets," says Weiss, who treats patients with Vanquish at his office outside Baltimore. He says that many can expect to lose one to two inches off their waist size and drop two to three pounds. "The results are not as dramatic as liposuction, which can remove large volumes of fat," notes McDaniel, but Vanquish does not carry the risks of surgery or anesthesia. Adam Kolker, a plastic surgeon and an associate clinical professor of surgery at Mount Sinai Hospital's Icahn School of Medicine in New York, remains a proponent of liposuction and tummy tucks for serious fat reduction. "I've seen a lot of people who've undergone various nonsurgical fat-reduction treatments who were underwhelmed with the results," he says. Nevertheless, Kolker is not ruling out a place for Vanquish: "It may be appropriate for small-scale changes as long as the patient's expectations are well managed."

Patricia Wexler, a dermatologist to New York's A-list, believes that there will be a huge market for the procedure. "It's great for women who are in good shape, within 5 to 10 percent of their ideal weight, and don't want to go through surgery," Wexler says. "A lot of women exercise and don't have a lot of weight to lose"—Vanquish doesn't work on cellulite or excess skin—"but they've had children or seen changes in their core for other reasons," she says, adding that you have to be motivated to keep the weight off. If you go on a post-Vanquish binge of hot fudge sundaes, the fat may not come back in your abs, but it will come back somewhere.

Sandra*, 43, recently finished her fourth session with Weiss. Though she had been in good shape otherwise, she hated how her stomach looked postpregnancy. "I go to the gym four times a week, but I couldn't lose the pooch," she recalls. Sandra found the procedure so relaxing, she drifted off to sleep during one session. "It's like lying under a heat lamp." She's happy with the results. "I lost 1.37 inches around my waist. It makes a big difference when you look down and don't see a bulge. I went out and bought a new bikini." Miranda*, 29, also completed four treatments, and lost almost five inches within two months. "My skin was a little bit pink and warm, but I went straight to work after each session. After the second treatment my skin felt tighter and there was less of a bulge. After four treatments it was definitely noticeable," she says. While Vanquish is currently designed for use only on the abdomen and love handles, chances are good that it will be adapted to treat other areas in the future. (Saddlebags, consider yourselves warned.) In the meantime, if you're thinking of trying Vanquish, Wexler has this tip: Drink lots of water before your treatment. "The more water in the cells, the easier it is for the radio frequency waves to target the fat," she explains. "Frankly, I'd rather drink a bottle or two of water than exercise any day." ■ * Names have been changed