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Smartlipo FDA Approved

The Smartlipo laser-assisted lipolysis system receives FDA approval for fat destruction and skin tightening.

Nearly half a million liposuction treatments were performed in 2005, according to the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. The recent U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval of Smartlipo, a fat removal system that combines laser technologies with liposuction, is likely to push those numbers even higher. The system reduces bleeding, can be performed under local anesthetic and offers a quick recovery time with no stitches.

"Smartlipo, which received FDA approval for laser-assisted lipolysis, vaporization of tissue and coagulation of tissue leading to skin tightening, has been available throughout the world for several years," says Marina Kamenakis, vice-president of clinical marketing and education, Cynosure, Westford, Massachusetts. "Cynosure acquired FDA approval for the system in October 2006, and rights to distribute Smartlipo throughout North America."

The concept of laser-assisted lipolysis (the destruction of fat cells) first appeared in the mid-1990s when David B. Apfelberg, MD, began researching a new technique that combined traditional liposuction with an Nd:YAG laser. The idea was to see if the combination of laser skin tightening and fat removal could replace surgery in

some areas, such as under the chin, in the upper arms and the abdomen where traditional liposuction left behind loose, sagging skin that often had to be surgically removed.

"This system was made for small areas of fat deposits that also require skin tightening," says Bruce Katz, MD, clinical professor, dermatology, Mount Sinai School of Medicine and director, Juva Skin & Laser Center, New York, whose center took part in the FDA trials for Smartlipo. "If you do areas like the neck or arms, or the abdomen following childbirth, where the skin is very loose with small deposits of fat, traditional liposuction can make these areas worse. This system allows us to simultaneously melt the fat and tighten the skin to improve the appearance of the area."

How It Works

Smartlipo uses a 1064 nm laser fiber introduced through a 1 mm cannula. A mixture of numbing agents and saline is introduced into the area. During treatment, the laser comes in direct contact with subcutaneous fat, causing the adipocytes to rupture. The debris is then suctioned out. The heat energy of the laser effects production of collagen and shrinks tissue. It also coagulates blood vessels in the area to reduce bleeding, which is typically associated with liposuction procedures.

"All you need is a 1 to 2 mm incision, which is significantly smaller than the incision needed for liposuction," says Katz. "The cannula itself is so tiny that trauma to the area is minimal."

The less invasive procedure allows for a shorter recovery time with patients returning to normal activities in just days following the procedure. "We tell our patients to take off the day following the procedure because there is some drainage," says Katz, "but they can go back to work the next day."

Risk of complications with the procedure is relatively low. Alberto Goldman, MD, a senior member of the Brazilian Society of Plastic Surgery, has studied laser-assisted lipolysis for



Courtesy Cynosure

▲ Smartlipo works best for small fat deposits where skin tightening is also needed.

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several years. In a 2002 study entitled, "Laserlipolysis: Liposuction Using Nd:YAG Laser," Goldman reports that among 1,734 patients, "one suffered a small 1 cm diameter burn; / there were 37 cases of asymmetry, one seroma and a small infection in the site where the microcannula penetrated."

Goldman credits some of the adverse reactions, particularly problems with asymmetry, to a sharp learning curve. "Doctors who are interested in learning the technique should have some experience with traditional liposuction as well as lasers," says Katz, who notes, "We haven't seen any serious side effects. There is some bruising and swelling that occurs but that goes away within a few days." Cynosure will set up preceptorships for physicians who would like to learn Smartlipo.

With a price tag of about \$90,000, the system is not cheap, but the demand is high, according to Katz, who points to the popularity of liposuction and the desire of so many Americans to trim troublesome areas. "You should be well trained to give your patients the full benefits of the treatment," he says. "But I didn't need to market the system. There are so many patients coming in and requesting this type of service." The procedure is performed in one session starting at \$3,000 to \$4,000 per treatment.

"While having experience with liposuction is very helpful in learning Smartlipo, it is a gentler technique," says Kamenakis. ✦

Inga Hansen is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer.

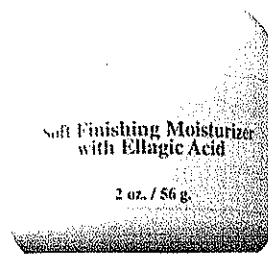
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