

change

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TRACKING TRENDS ABOUT TO HIT YOU, EVERY WEEK



Dr Preeti Sali of AMAYA clinic in Santacruz uses Zerona, whose four robotic arms beam laser rays to reduce fat. PICS/SATYAJIT DESAI

LASERS

THAT

ZAP FAT

As the battle against the bulge rages unabated, and weight-loss clinics mushroom across the country, laser beams and ultrasound machines are the latest tools to fight this 'war' against fat. LHENDUP G BHUTIA reports

AT 1 o'clock in the afternoon, when most Mumbaikars are halfway through their working day, Niren Jhaveri, a Napean Sea Road resident who runs a call centre in Malad, is on his way to work. At 47 years, this bespectacled man with a receding hairline looks moderately healthy. He stands 5'8" tall and weighs 72 kg. But, as he reaches Santacruz, he swerves his car into a bylane to reach an anti-ageing clinic located close to Asha Parekh Hospital. Here, he exchanges his spectacles for a pair of anti-ray glares, and stripping down to just his Y front briefs, lies down on a bed in a darkened room. A large machine with four robotic arms gets working on him. Each of these arms, placed six inches away from his body, beam a strange red light onto his midriff and thighs.

CONTD ON PG 2

Lasers that zap fat

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Jhaveri is using Zerona, one of the latest non-invasive technologies introduced in the Indian market, that uses laser beams to reduce weight. And it is not the only one. As losing weight becomes the defining quest of modern living and 'weight-loss' gyms and clinics that promise to surgically vacuum out fat mushroom across the city, many doctors are now offering new non-surgical procedures to combat weight-gain via laser rays and ultrasound machines.

Thin in weeks

Apart from Zerona, other new-age procedures include I-Lipo, which also uses laser beams, and Proslimelt, which uses ultrasound waves to break down fat. Unlike liposuction, where doctors operate on patients to pump out fat, these methods are non-invasive, pain-free and reportedly produce results in weeks.

All one has to do is focus the beams on specific fat-heavy areas of the body. For Jhaveri, that offending jiggle is his midriff and thighs. He says, "I have never had a weight problem. But over the years I realised that I was accumulating weight on my abdomen and thighs. Despite strenuous exercises, I was unable to shed the fat in these areas. I am certain, I will now."

ONE MUST REMEMBER THAT THERE HAVE NOT BEEN SUFFICIENT TESTS TO SEE HOW MUCH OF EXPOSURE TO LASER, HOWEVER LOW IN INTENSITY, IS SAFE.

DR SANJAY BORUDE
Consultant bariatric surgeon at Breach Candy Hospital

WEIGHT LOSS HAS, FOR ME, BEEN A LIFE-LONG STRUGGLE. I TRIED EVERY FORM OF EXERCISE AND MEDICATION TO LOSE WEIGHT. LAST YEAR, I LEARNT THAT SOMETHING LIKE ZERONA WAS BEING USED HERE AND DECIDED TO GIVE IT A SHOT.

AMRITA GUPTA
Call centre employee who, after 24 sessions of Zerona, went from 104 kg to 91 kg

already, he will shed a few more inches within another two weeks, claims Dr Preeti Sali, the clinic's consultant physician.

Waves that zap fat

How do these methods work? The laser beam pushes triglycerides out of fat cells (much in the same way that air is released out of a pricked balloon) which are then egested through the body's natural metabolic system. Doctors recommend that patients exercise and follow a prescribed low-carb diet to keep the fat off in the long term. They claim that the procedure is safe, because the laser beams or ultrasound waves are of low intensity.

In the case of Zerona, the laser ray is of 634 nanometer wavelength, and in I-Lipo, the wavelength is not more than 650 nanometer. Unlike ultrasound machines that use a minimum intensity of 450 kilohertz (khz) waves for investigations, Proslimelt uses low frequency waves of between 30 khz to 70 khz.

All for those abs

These procedures, which are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the apex public health regulatory body in the United States, may have been introduced to India only as recently as late last year, but according to doctors employing these machines, they are already proving to be as popular here as they are in the West.

According to Dr Abhijit Desai, managing director at Evolve, which with its three branches in Mumbai became the

first clinic to introduce I-Lipo in India, "Since August 2010, over 700 patients have undergone i-Lipo sessions in Mumbai. Every month, at least 40 to 50 new patients try it out." In the case of I-Lipo, four pads, which emit low-level laser beams, are attached to the target area in the body.

AMAYA Clinic, which in August 2010 became the first clinic to offer Zerona in India, claims to have seen over 140 patients till now. "While most use the machine to lose weight from their abdomen, thighs, and arms, many have even used it to lose weight from their face and neck," says Dr Deepak Chaturvedi, who runs the clinic. Barely three months after they opened, Chaturvedi invested in another machine for his Santacruz clinic.

One of his patients is 37 year-old Sangeeta Thomas, a social worker who runs an NGO in Chembur. At 5'2", she weighed 67 kg and had a waist size of 34 inches. "I had made desperate attempts to lose weight earlier. I would exercise and lose a kilo or two. But then in a month or two it would return," says Thomas. Then when her sister's wedding was fixed, she had less than a month to shed the flab. "I wanted to look good that day. No exercise would help me see results that quickly and I didn't want to opt for surgery. I started looking for options and learnt about Zerona," she says. After a 10-session course, she claims to have lost four inches from her waist and reached her target weight of 60 kg.

Skin Alive, a clinic in New Delhi's Panchsheel Park offers both, Proslimelt and I-Lipo. According to Anupama Arora, media manager of the clinic, I-Lipo is currently more in demand, and they recommend the procedure to patients with 'loose' fat, and use Proslimelt on those with "stubborn fat". In some cases, a combination of both is offered. "We recommend eight sessions of I-Lipo or four sessions of Proslimelt, for a patient wanting to lose two to four inches," she says.

Exercise? What's that?

But this can't possibly be healthy, can it? While in the US and UK, a maximum of six sessions are recommended with Zerona, Chaturvedi provides a minimum of eight to 10 sessions, and increases the number according to the need.

Amrita Gupta, a Mumbai resident who heads operations at a call centre, has so far undergone four sets of eight sessions each, and is on her fifth set. At the start of her first session, in September 2010, she weighed 104 kg.

By the end of her third session, she had reduced her weight to 91 kg. She, however, had to leave the country for a few months, and without proper exercise, gained five kilos. Now she is back to using Zerona, and has set herself a target weight of 85 kg.

"Weight loss has been a lifelong struggle for me. I tried every form of exercise and medication to lose weight. Last year, I learnt that something like Zerona was being used here and decided to give it a shot," she says.

With a pinch of salt

Even though the intensity of the beams is low, can excessive use of such lasers be harmful, wonder skeptics. Experts are circumspect and say these technologies are still relatively new and it will take a while before one can assess their efficacy.

According to Dr Sanjay Borude, consultant bariatric surgeon at Breach Candy Hospital, these procedures are at best a quick-fix solution. "There are only two ways of losing fat — exercise or surgical methods like liposuction, and bariatric surgery, when the patient is morbidly obese. Other methods are superficial and target the fat at the subcutaneous level (just under the skin)." He adds that in some cases, patients have reported regaining fat after losing it initially. "One must keep in mind that not enough tests have been conducted to see how much exposure to laser, however low in intensity, is safe."

Dr Richa Anand, chief dietician at Hiranandani Hospital in Powai, believes that such new procedures are gaining popularity because people are looking for instant results. They'd rather stay clear of physically exerting themselves and controlling their diet. "Any kind of fat, even that which accumulates in the midriff and thighs, can be shed through natural means. One should avoid such procedures, because their effect on the system has not been explored fully."

However, for the likes of Jhaveri, the availability of such a treatment is a source of relief. As he drives off to work after his 40-minute session, he says, "I drop in every alternate day while on my way to work. I didn't think that the feeling of my trousers feeling loose on my tummy would bring so much joy."

Names of patients have been changed on request.
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SHOW ME THE MONEY	COST
ZERONA	₹3,500 to 5,000 per session
I-LIPO	₹25,000 for eight sessions

How EFFECTIVE is Zerona?

The clinical trial to investigate the efficacy of Zerona commenced in 2008 in the US. The trial enrolled 67 subjects, 35 of whom were randomly assigned to receive "active" or "real" treatment, with 32 randomly assigned to the "sham" or inactive group. Both groups were asked to sign an affidavit stating that during the clinical trial they would make no changes to their lifestyle and would not participate in any other programme or consume any supplements that would promote slimming. Furthermore, patients were asked to track their daily activities and caloric intake through the entire duration of the trial. This daily journal

ensured that patients were not making any changes that could have an impact on the outcome of the trial. Patients received treatment every other day for two weeks, receiving a total of six treatments. Patients' waist, hips, and thighs were treated concurrently for 40 minutes, including 20 minutes of anterior or front treatment and 20 minutes of posterior or back treatment. After two weeks the "active" treatment group averaged a cumulative reduction of 3.54" compared to the "sham" group which averaged a cumulative reduction of just 0.68". The study was reported in the science journal *Laser's in Surgery and Medicine* in 2009