

The cold facts

*With so many fat freezing and body contouring machines on the market at the moment, how can you navigate through the sales pitch of each clinic and find the right treatment for you? Jane Sherwood talks to **Springwell Clinics** body aesthetician, Donna.*

The January 2018 edition of **Aesthetic Medicine** featured the top twenty body contouring machines in its **Body Shaping Dossier**, and that wasn't even an exhaustive list (for example, it didn't feature CoolTech® and other products as yet untested in the UK market). Although many people looking for body contouring treatments are aware of fat freezing, they may be unaware of the other treatments that can offer effective results, either in conjunction with fat freezing, or instead of it, if more appropriate. It then becomes even more difficult to know which treatment is the most appropriate and cost-effective for you.

How do the fat freezing machines work?

Cryolipolysis (fat freezing) machines work in essentially the same manner. They bring the temperature of an area of skin and sub-epidermal structures down to around -5° or lower in order to either kill off the fat cells immediately, or to damage them beyond repair. The immune system then removes the dead and irrevocably damaged fat cells over the space of about 12 weeks. Typically, the number of fat cells affected is 25% to 33% of the total per treatment. Although -5° is cold enough to damage fat cells in this way, is not cold enough to damage blood or nerve vessels permanently, and a temperature of -5° will result in numb tissue for typically just a couple of hours. However, there is variation between machines here.

Colder than this (CoolSculpt® reduces the temperature to -8°) might not cause permanent damage to the nerve and blood vessels, but may be cold enough to produce numbness lasting several weeks or months. It is worth asking about the target temperature and likely period of numbness.

So is the cost of treatment similar across the range of machines available?

Although these machines all work on a similar premise, there can be a huge variation in cost, and it is not necessarily related to efficacy! A likely explanation comes down to how much it costs to buy the machine, run it, pay the manufacturing company commission, and then pay the cost of consumable products used during treatments, all of which will have to be factored in as overheads in your treatment cost.

Also related to the cost of treatment, is the number of treatments required. Most lipolysis procedures need to be repeated in each area, the average number of treatments being three. However, some machines can treat two areas at a time, such as the 3D-lipomed®, which has two heads and can therefore treat both sides of the hips or abdomen simultaneously, for example; others only have a mono head option, such as CoolSculpt®. You will need to ascertain if treating the other side of the body incurs an additional cost.

Apart from cost, how else can I evaluate the range of machines?

It can be tempting to think about comparing the efficacy of treatments of various machines based on whether they have produced "clinically proven" results.

Unfortunately, this is a term that means ... well, nothing. At least, not in reputable medical circles. Although the term makes it sound as though the product has undergone rigorous testing in clinical trials, complete with a control group, this is rarely the case, especially for machines such as these.

Proving something in medical terms means that a statistical significance has to be attached to the "proof". For example, producing a new antibiotic that gave you

a mere 5% chance of survival if you had sepsis could still be regarded as "clinically proven". What isn't stated is that it is only clinically proven to save 5% of lives. This is why you rarely see the term used by serious medical companies or manufacturers. Sadly, the term "clinically proven" is more likely to be used as marketing hype by a clinic and should be ignored.

How reliable are "before and after" pictures for evaluating efficacy of treatment?

"Before and after" images are a very effective method of recording the progress of your treatment, but there is one aspect of this that should be born in mind. For a while now, we have been noticing a significant but positive theme when it comes to any body contouring treatments that we carry out, including fat freezing, and that is that simply having the treatment seems to spur patients on with weight loss targets, including working out at the gym and sticking to a weight-loss diet. In these situations it becomes impossible to apportion the degree of shape change seen in these "before and after" photos to the treatment, the weight loss regime and the gym sessions. At Springwell Clinic, we talk about this a lot, because we believe it is a positive aspect of the treatment.

We know that cryolipolysis works, even without any other intervention, because of trials carried out treating just one side of the body, so we don't feel the need to endorse the treatment in this way, by claiming that the change in shape is necessarily wholly the result of treatment. We therefore encourage an all-round holistic approach to maximise the effect of treatment with diet and lifestyle adjustments, which we can advise upon if requested, and we take "before and after pictures" for your own records.

Should a machine be considered superior if it has been FDA-approved?

The answer to that is probably not. FDA is the Food and Drug Administration Board for the US, so if any particular machine doesn't

Before treatment



After treatment



have US exposure, it is unlikely to be put forward for FDA approval. Furthermore, the FDA is concerned with balancing risk with outcome. If the risks (that is, side-effects) are low, then the product will only undergo general controls, rather than a full randomised control trial. Imagine the difference in trialling that would be required to get FDA approval for a pacemaker, compared to a metal tongue depressor, for example.

What about other body contouring treatments available?

Many use a combination of ultrasound and radio frequency, the former to break open fat cells so that the liver can ultimately process the contents, and the latter to smooth the appearance of, and tighten, the skin (which is usually required regardless of type of inch loss treatment administered, simply because the skin has lost some of its underlying "padding"). In this area, there can be subtle differences between machines. For example, radio frequency skin tightening

and smoothing is much more effective if the technology uses Focus Fractional Tripolar Radiofrequency, rather than the out-of-date (but still employed) unipolar technology. Unipolar RF produces a deep and uncontrolled penetration of the skin, and it has never been properly established where or how it spreads throughout the body. It also results in the skin being hotter on the surface than underneath, where you want it, which means that it is not only more uncomfortable, it is also less efficient.

Tripolar RF is much more comfortable because the skin below the surface is the hotter part, and the penetration depth is much deeper and more controlled. If the radio frequency method employs a unipolar device, then additional cellulite-specific treatment usually needs to be factored into the treatment, possible at extra cost, because there is less of a smoothing and tightening effect. Put simply, unipolar RF is often not enough on its own.



Before treatment

After treatment

In conclusion, we would advise you to discuss your concerns and desired outcome at the clinic(s) of your choice. Factor in cost, number of treatments, types of treatments, length of treatment, period between treatments (so that you know what you're committing to) and discuss realistic outcome. But don't be fooled into believing that "clinical proven results" and "FDA approved" will give you superior results.

Springwell Clinic's Body Contouring Treatment Options

At Springwell Clinic we use the 3D-lipomed® machine, which is equipped with two cryolipolysis heads that can be used simultaneously at no extra charge, and which also employs electrophoresis to encourage lymphatic drainage and waste removal during freezing, helping to reduce any toxin accumulation and improve the sluggish circulation associated with cellulite.

The machine has an ultrasound option (cavitation) for inch-loss contouring and the radio frequency configuration is Focus Fractional Tripolar RF. We offer a free-of-charge consultation where we discuss the most appropriate treatment, not only for your body shape and your personal concerns, but also for your budget and commitment time. We offer free-of-charge nutritional and lifestyle advice if requested.



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