

THE NEW LIPO:

HAS FAT MET ITS MATCH?



The FDA approves a new fat-zapping technique that doctors say will help patients lose a size or two—fast!—without leaving behind stitches or saggy skin

1 MONTH AFTER COLLEEN DONOVAN

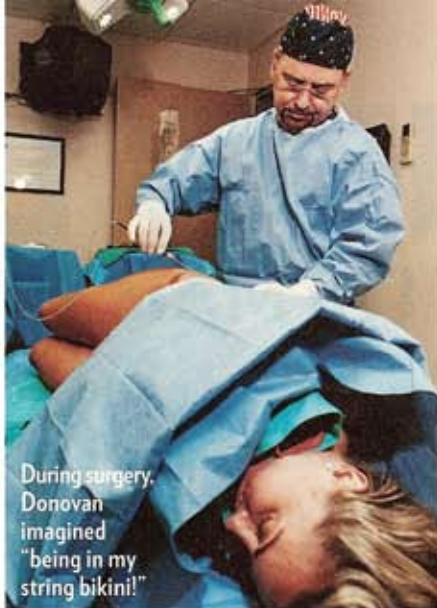
"I eat well, I did a triathlon, I've trained my whole life," says Donovan, who still couldn't get the slim shape she wanted. She's pleased with her results after laser lipolysis. "You don't lose weight, you lose volume—I swish in my jeans!" she says. "When all my friends see me, they're like, 'Wow.'"

Colleen Donovan doesn't mind trading a little pain for beauty. The Long Beach, N.Y., esthetician had breast implants put in 14 years ago and regularly gives clients glycolic acid facial peels. But despite always wanting "thighs that don't touch," she had never considered liposuction, often used to sculpt targeted areas of the body. "Lipo scared me—I don't like the dimpling, puckering effect," says Donovan, 37, referring to a sometime side effect of the procedure, which can leave behind unsightly pockets where the fat had been. And so despite her considerable

efforts—she bikes, swims, and works out three times a week with a trainer—she had all but resigned herself to the idea that her inner thighs would maintain permanent contact.

But then last fall, Donovan got a phone call that seemed to bring with it the promise of the body she wanted—without any of the drawbacks she worried about. It was from Dr. Bruce Katz, a dermatologist whom she knew professionally, asking if she'd like to take part in the trial study for a new device called SmartLipo. Done under local anesthesia, the procedure is known generically as laser lipolysis and uses a laser light to





During surgery, Donovan imagined "being in my string bikini!"



The incisions Katz made for the laser to enter were small enough not to require stitches.

DOING LASER LIPO Katz began by marking up the target areas on Donovan's body, then injected a cocktail of three local anesthetics. About 20 minutes later, Katz threaded a laser fiber through a metal tube 1 mm in diameter; he then zapped fat cells into liquid, most of which oozed out through the incisions.

zap away fat—yielding, he told her, better, faster, less painful results than from traditional lipo. "I thought it would satisfy something that I've always wanted to change about my body," Donovan recalls. "I was so excited."

After all, who hasn't dreamed of unwanted fat vanishing as easily as that second serving of Häagen-Dazs? Granted, SmartLipo doesn't work quite like that—but with the Food and Drug Administration's Oct. 31 announcement that it had approved the use of the device in this country, many are saying that, for now, SmartLipo may be as close as humans can come to that fat-melting fantasy. In fact, as soon as the FDA gave the okay, Katz, the first U.S. doctor trained in the technique

(there are about 100 around the world), began "booking five or six surgeries a day," he says, with "rock stars, actors, and business people calling," as well as patients from as far away as Kuwait. Already, Katz's schedule is filled through mid-February, and there is also a waiting list of doctors who want to learn how to use their own SmartLipo machines—the first new FDA-approved lipo technology in four years—which sell for \$75,000.

So what is all the fuss about? According to Katz and other doctors familiar with the technology, which has been readily available in other parts of the world, including Italy, Brazil and Singapore for as long as five years, SmartLipo offers several key advantages over tra-

ditional lipo. First among them: Where regular lipo leaves skin looking "like a deflated balloon," says Katz, in the spots where fat has been removed, the laser used in SmartLipo helps stimulate the production of collagen—which can tighten the skin in the surrounding area.

In addition, because patients need only a local anesthetic, instead of general, they remain awake during the procedure and can stand up periodically during the surgery, allowing the doctor to eyeball his work. Because he can tweak as he goes, it is less likely that the patient will need to return for touch-ups, which occur in about 20 percent of regular lipo patients.

Finally, unlike old-school lipo, which sucks out solid fat through a metal tube, laser lipolysis uses a glowing optical fiber (the doctor can watch it under the skin) to selectively target and dissolve fat. The liquid fat is then either drained or absorbed by the body's lymphatic system and excreted (see Q&A for more details). Using the lasers, there is less blood loss and trauma, which helps explain why fewer than one percent of laser lipolysis patients suffer complications. By comparison, conventional lipo has up to a 10 percent complication rate and, according to a 1998 study (the most recent available), a fatality rate of 1 in 5000.

OLD LIPO VS. SMARTLIPO

- Usually under general anesthesia
- Loose skin remains where fat is sucked out
- A 4- to 6-mm tube sucks out solid fat; lots of tissue trauma
- Scarring where tube enters body; stitches often required
- Resume work after a week
- Lipo on abdomen: \$6,500

- Always with local anesthesia
- Tightened skin from collagen production where lasers are used (visible after three to six months)
- 1-mm tube fitted with laser melts fat; little trauma
- Almost no scarring; no stitches needed
- Resume work after two days
- Laser lipo on abdomen: \$5,000