

£10k to freeze my fat at Harvey Nicks? No thank

Extreme beauty

Fat-busting in a fashion store, laser treatments on the high street — Alex Clark on the rise of the medspa

The slim grey machine in front of me is making the phone jump off the hook. It looks like an anonymous piece of office equipment, but the clue to its identity comes from its strange vacuum-hose-like attachment — and the fact that I am in the Beyond MediSpa at Harvey Nichols, in London. This apparatus delivers something called the Zeltiq CoolSculpting treatment, which holds out the hope that our spare tyres might deflate and our muffin tops melt away.

Here's the idea: if we submit our surplus flesh to the machine's Cryolipolysis technique, the fat cells will be frozen and then flushed out of our system by a natural process of lymphatic drainage. For good. Not only that, but there are, apparently, virtually no side-effects, minimal discomfort and no knives; just a suction mechanism that draws our bulges gently up and chills them for an hour at a time. In the States, where the machine has just received the approval of the Food and Drug Administration, it has garnered rave reviews from patients who have seen their unwanted extrasshrink. What's not to love?

If there are industry awards for tact, then Magda, who is taking me through the ins and outs of the Zeltiq, should sweep the board, so much so that I briefly consider asking her to move in with me to administer a daily ego boost. Not only has she managed to find something positive in her inspection of my wobbly bits ("Your back is good"), but she is telling me that, on balance, the treatment is probably not for me.

The issue, it emerges, is one of scale. If she were to tackle my main "problem area" — a masterfully delicate way to describe my impressive stomach — she would probably need to attach the suction device to it in three different sites; and then she would need to repeat that treatment five or six times, with a gap of two months between each cycle. Not only is that a long time to wait for my bikini-ready tummy, but it's also a major cash investment: at £800 per



following a sensible exercise programme, finds themselves with a troublesome patch of fat that they can't seem to shift; in cases such as these, best results can even be achieved by a single treatment, with a reduction in fat cells of between 20 and 40 per cent. Typically, you have to wait for at least two months to see any real difference, and the process of fat-flushing will continue for another four after that.

As I leave Harvey Nichols, both belly and dignity (thanks to Magda) intact, I hear the receptionist fielding another inquiry about the treatment: for six months this spa has exclusive rights to use the Zeltiq in the UK, and it seems that the list of those who don't mind shedding cash

“My treatment could take a year — a long

as well as inches is growing by the minute. (This week a Saga survey found that the over-fifties spend £2.2 billion a year on hair and beauty treatments.)

But if the enthusiasm of the well-heeled body-conscious for CoolSculpting — new, exclusive, non-invasive — is understandable, it also gives us a glimpse into an increasing appetite for treatments that go beyond the remit of the traditional beauty salon but fall short of full-blown surgical intervention. At Harvey Nichols, there's a vast range of injectables, facial peels, intense pulsed light therapy and laser treatments, all of which come with involved descriptions and the odd wonderfully wacky name, my favourite being Multitrepennic Collagen Actuation therapy.

Gone, it appears, are the days when a beautician smoothed a layer of thick white cream over your mush and left you in a darkened room with some whale music. Now every posh department store worth its salt has a medspa and even The Sanctuary, that haven of old-fashioned pampering, has opened three high street medspas

their "Drip'n'Chill" proteins and vitamins are pumped into the bloodstream via a drip. Designed to address facial immune system problems, it is tailored to an individual. Add to that the spa's Spas Pod — a relaxation treatment that turns patients into a meditative state — and a 45-minute session costs

A recurring phrase with medspa professionals: "realistic expectations"; clearly that we perceive a procedure and expect to see results. But the clients I spoke to were keen on their role in influencing the results by sticking rigorously to aftercare — for example, avoiding alcohol, caffeine, sunbathing and exercise after the non-surgical alteration. What many of them offer is fine-tuning, rather than major alteration, for those with the patience to keep chasing