Medical Xpress

Laser liposuction melts fat, results in tighter skin

April 15 2013

A new, minimally invasive treatment that uses lasers to melt fat could replace the "tummy tuck," suggests research on more than 2,000 people being presented at the Society of Interventional Radiology's 38th Annual Scientific Meeting in New Orleans.

Without the risks of a surgical procedure (such as the tummy tuck) and when used in combination with standard liposuction, the fat-melting action of laser lipolysis, a minimally invasive treatment, has the added benefit of producing new collagen (collagen is the main protein that gives the skin its tone and texture). Additionally, the laser causes the collagen to contract, which tightens the skin. This tightening alleviates the fear of skin sagging, a common complaint after standard liposuction. Laser lipolysis also enables the removal of more fat than standard liposuction.

"Many women who have standard liposuction are discouraged because often the skin sags after the fat is removed," said Abbas Chamsuddin, M.D., lead author of the study and an interventional radiologist at the Center for Laser and Interventional Surgery in Atlanta, Ga. "Ultrasound-assisted guidance of a fiber-optic laser during laser lipolysis can be used on many parts of the body and results in excellent sculpting with tight skin," he added.

"Liposuction has been around for more than 20 years. Many people don't try it because they have heard that the skin often sags after the fat is removed. This is especially true for individuals who want to lose

abdominal fat, but also need the skin to retract. Traditional liposuction also has a limitation to the volume of fat that could potentially be removed," said Chamsuddin. "Combining traditional liposuction with laser lipolysis has now been shown to produce well-sculpted bodies with tight skin. We are able to give people things such as a tighter abdomen without the need for surgery," he said.

Between February 2009 and July 2012, a group of 2,183 individuals, ages 17 to 73 (75 percent female, 25 percent male), underwent laser-assisted lipolysis and liposuction on multiple areas of the body, including the neck, arms, love handles, breast, belly, thighs and calves. Prior to treatment, each person had measurements recorded including weight, diameter of the area treated and skin tightness. At each follow-up appointment the diameter of the treatment areas was measured and recorded. Skin tightness was also recorded against control criteria.

The laser's thermal (heat) energy melts the fat and standard liposuction removes it from the body, noted Chamsuddin. Patient follow-up was daily for a week and then at one, three and six months. All treated areas showed improvement in reducing fat bulk as well as tightening skin. The laser uses targeted energy to "zero in" on the fat, without affecting the other tissue, enabling a faster recovery, he added.

More information: Abstract 143: "Laser Liposuction in Interventional Radiology," A. Chamsuddin, M. Zayour; CLIS, Atlanta, Ga., SIR 38th Annual Scientific Meeting, April 13-18, 2013. This abstract can be found at www.SIRmeeting.org

Provided by Society of Interventional Radiology

Citation: Laser liposuction melts fat, results in tighter skin (2013, April 15) retrieved 12 October

2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-04-laser-liposuction-fat-results-tighter.html

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