

features

- 2 no knives about it
- 4 skin care for kids
- 6 how deep is your love?
- 8 good food
- 10 get fit

columns

- 3 in short
- 4 princess diary
- 12 personal trainer
- 12 try it out
- 14 cosmic girl
- 15 dr cindy pan
- 16 toby green
- 17 motivation
- 18 on life
- 19 your stars
- 20 spotlight

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cover story



NO knives ABOUT IT

A variety of treatments now fight unwanted fat and sagging skin without surgery. **Joanna Hall** road tests a few of the latest innovations.

Australians have fully embraced the concept of self-improvement and fighting the ageing process. And if it can be done without going under the knife, all the better.

Non-surgical treatments are the fastest growing sector in the health and beauty industry. There are no statistics for Australia specifically, but what's going on across the pond mirrors the growing trend here.

According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, approximately 8.4 million minimally-invasive cosmetic plastic surgery procedures were performed in the US in 2005 – up 53 per cent since 2000.

"There is a huge increase in the demand for non-invasive treatments, as there is very little 'downtime' and inconvenience," says Sydney cosmetic physician, Dr Suri Nair. "This is evidenced by the monumental increase in popularity of Botox."

Two of the latest procedures on the market are set to take the buzzword "non-surgical" to new levels. One is body contouring treatment UltraShape.

For a variety of reasons, some men and women have fat deposits that refuse to budge, regardless of how much they diet or exercise. Typical areas include the so-called love handles, abdomen and thighs.

While many of us put up with these imperfections, some turn to liposuction to fine tune their physique. UltraShape is a non-invasive alternative that claims to destroy fat cells permanently without affecting neighbouring tissues.

Immediately following treatment, the body's natural processes clear away the destroyed fat cells. And the good news is that they don't come back.

"What is destroyed is destroyed," says Dr Nair. "Your body does not make new fat cells."

Clinical trials show one treatment gives an average reduction of two centimetres in body circumference. Thinking it sounded too good to be true, I visited Dr Nair to see if UltraShape could get rid of the small pad of fat around my navel.

After taking detailed measurements, the target area was marked up with a series of points as I lay on a treatment bed. The actual procedure involved use of a round, hand-held transducer, which moved over each point, treating it once with the ultrasound energy.

I felt nothing except for a slight warmth, and about one-and-a-half hours later, I went home feeling no side effects whatsoever. Days later, I was convinced my tummy was flatter, but the moment of truth came after a fortnight when new measurements were taken: I'd lost a total of three centimetres in circumference.

Dr Nair says the best candidate for UltraShape is someone close to their ideal weight who has a healthy diet and exercises regularly. "It is not suitable for people looking to lose weight, or those who have excess stretched skin," he says.

The cost of the treatment is determined by the number of "shots" of ultrasound used. "At present, we are charging \$1 per shot," says Dr Nair. My treatment area was 620 shots.

LOOSE SKIN

If your problem is loose skin, however, a new procedure called Skin Tightening may be the answer.

During the skin's natural ageing process, collagen production slows and elastin, the substance that enables skin to snap back into place, has a bit less spring. That's when you may notice subtle sagging around your forehead or jowls, and when those first fine lines and wrinkles start to appear.

Skin Tightening uses bipolar radio frequency energy to smooth and refine loose and sagging skin on the face, tummy and hard to reach places such as the neck. Sydney plastic surgeon Dr Mark Kohout explains: "The procedure evens out skin and