

SHORT CUTS

Don't fancy surgery? New salon treatments promise to change the way your body looks. **Catherine Turner** got plugged in to see if they really work.

Wanted: one new pair of pert breasts. Cost of surgery: about £5,000. Inconvenience: pain, recovery time, scars and the risks involved with a general anaesthetic.

These are factors that anyone who is contemplating cosmetic surgery must face in their quest for the body beautiful. Until now, slapping on buckets of "miracle" cream and performing several renditions of "I must, I must" have been the only alternatives to the surgeon's knife. But that is changing. A new wave of high-tech toning methods, which use an array of electric currents, sound waves, mechanical vacuums and massage techniques, is aiding the never-ending quest for youthfulness and physical perfection.

These treatments are based on electronic muscle stimulation (EMS) technology, used by the medical industry for decades and remarketed at regular intervals to the public as slimming and firming treatments (remember Slendertone?).

The problem is that the marketing hype — and the back-of-magazine, before-and-after, beer-belly-to-six-pack photographs — would have us believe that we can go from flab to muscle just by attaching a few electrodes.

Look behind the hype, however, and there are benefits to be had that even leading cosmetic surgeons approve of. The most up-to-date and successful versions take the form of salon treatments that tap into the proven medical benefits of manual massage, such as boosting circulation and stimulating the lymph to help keep skin smooth, toned and firm. In a slightly different application, galvanic currents and sound waves are being combined to improve the penetration of active ingredients into the skin for a healing and firming effect.

"This process had a reputation as hocus-pocus until recently, when medical researchers started looking at it again. Today, we believe it can be as effective as injections into the skin," explains Dr Des Fernandes, a reconstructive and cosmetic surgeon. The message is that you will get results from machine-based treatments for specific problems (see below). They offer a viable, pain-free alternative to surgery — up to a point. The results won't last for ever, so you'll need to commit to regular top-ups to maintain the improvements.

Then again, there are worse things than spending half an hour at a spa every so often for the sake of pert breasts or firm thighs.

PROBLEM CELLULITE

High-tech solution Advanced Keymodule Endermologie

What is it? The newest version of the only Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved mechanical massage treatment to tackle cellulite. The therapist treats the area with a handheld massage head incorporating two motorised rollers that rotate in different directions and have a vacuum action. The intensity is adjusted to suit the individual. Feels like a deep-tissue massage

How does it work? A combination of rolling and suction movements soften fibrous, compacted fat cells. "Although liposuction is the only way to permanently remove fat, it doesn't remove cellulite. Endermologie is a temporary way to get rid of cellulite by smoothing the waviness in the skin and milking the fluid out of the tissues," says Dr Dan Goldberg, director of the Hurlingham Clinic and Spa

Number of treatments required 12-16

Catherine's rating 7/10 Dramatically firmer, less dimpled skin.

No inch loss, however

Cost From £40 for a 35-minute session

Contact 020 8731 5678

PROBLEM LOOSE, SAGGY SKIN ON FACE OR BODY

High-tech solution Beautytek

What is it? A low-intensity electric-current treatment designed by an Italian physician for pain relief. An electrolyte gel is applied, then the technician moves handheld wands, following acupuncture points, along the body's meridians

How does it work? Electrical currents kick-start the body's energy system, which in turn increases blood flow and boosts the lymph

Number of treatments required About a dozen

Catherine's rating 9/10 I had the treatment on my breasts.

After 6 sessions, my nipples started to lift; after 14, I no longer had to wear a bra. The downside is having to maintain the treatments regularly (every eight weeks). But for me, it is still preferable to surgery

Cost £150 per session

Contact 020 7722 1758

PROBLEM DOUBLE CHIN

High-tech solution Lift 6

What is it? A new FDA-approved mechanised massage technique. It uses a handheld gadget with different attachments to perform gentle pinching actions over the face. These help tone and tighten the skin

How does it work? By bringing the benefits of deep massage to the face, improving circulation and cell turnover

Number of treatments required 10

Catherine's rating 8/10 There was a tightening effect after one treatment, but all 10 are needed for a good result

Cost From £40 for a 30-minute session

Contact 020 8731 5678

PROBLEM PREMATURE AGEING

High-tech solution Environ Ionzyme Active Vitamin Facial

What is it? A pulsed electrical current combined with high-dose vitamin A and C gels. The gels are applied to the face and the electric current is delivered through a probe, propelling the vitamins deep into the skin. This method means that problem areas — say, lines around the mouth — can be targeted. There are no uncomfortable sensations

How does it work? The skin normally acts as a barrier to keep things out, but the precise combination of currents will allow active ingredients in. The skin-renewing and regenerating effects of vitamins A and C are well documented, and this is one of the most direct ways of delivering them to the skin

Number of treatments required 12

Catherine's rating 9/10 My skin immediately looked radiant and plumper, and my wrinkles were less prominent. The more sessions I had, the longer the effects lasted

Cost £60-£90

Contact 020 8450 2020

Useful contacts

Dr Dan Goldberg, the Hurlingham Clinic and Spa; 020 7348 6380. www.thehurlinghamclinic.co.uk. Esther Fieldgrass; 020 7603 6165. www.thebeautifulbodycompany.com. Dr Des Fernandes; www.drdes.co.za ■