



'Lunchtime Lipo' Draws Concern from Doctors

Women Who Participated in Lipodissolve Injections Speak Out

By HELAINE TABACOFF and DEIRDRE COHEN

April 11, 2008—

What if there was a way to get rid of that unwanted fat without going under the knife? How convenient it would be to stop by a clinic during your lunch hour, get a few injections and dissolve away your trouble spots of extra fat.

That's what appealed to 45-year-old Sheila Yee of Riverbank, Calif. A third-degree black belt and martial arts instructor, she works out six days a week and is about as fit as a woman can be.

But like a lot of women her age, she couldn't seem to get rid of the pouch around her belly. "Who wants to take martial arts from someone who doesn't look like they're in shape?" she said.

Yee was intrigued by the local advertisements for a new procedure commonly called by the trade name Lipodissolve, which claims to melt away fat with a simple injection of drugs. To avoid surgical liposuction, Yee thought she'd found the answer.

"I just knew that there was no cutting, there was no blood. There's no stitches," Yee said.

Watch the story on "20/20" Friday at 10 p.m. ET.

'Lunchtime Lipo'

Marketed as quick and easy "lunchtime lipo" at doctor's offices and spas around the country, it was enticing to many women who wanted a quick fix, women like Annette Clark and Paige Tate. The two 30-something moms were slim, like Yee, but fighting pesky unwanted stomach flab. "I thought it seemed like a miracle wonder and I was elated and couldn't wait to start," Clark said. All of the women, each from different states, said they were told by different spas that they were perfect candidates for Lipodissolve. The hefty price tag didn't deter them: Clark paid \$2,400 and the other women paid \$3,000 to \$4,000 for a series of injections. Almost immediately after her first injections, Clark said she knew something was wrong. "They gave me about six injections across my abdomen and within a matter of minutes I started having severe burning. By the time I got home, about an hour later, I looked like I was eight months pregnant."

But she says the swelling was one of the milder side effects. A few months into the treatment, she said she had a severe allergic reaction at a local drugstore. "My whole body was just covered in hives, itching really bad. I became very hot as I was waiting for my medication to be filled. I woke up in an ambulance," Clark recalled.

Open Wounds and Staph Infections

Gigi Hinton, 30, was thrilled at the thought of trimming her thighs and knees. Hinton said her nightmare began after a second round of nearly 20 injections to her knee. "After it scabbed over, maybe after a week or two, it really felt like something started to eat away at the skin beneath. And I was left with an open wound on my right knee," she said. "Even the nurses in the spa said they had never seen anything like that before."

But if Hinton had simply looked on the Internet, she would have found plenty of horror stories. [One posting was from Tate](#), who, after two treatments, wrote: "I was feeling constant headache, diarrhea & and the swelling would not go away."

Tate said she has been sick ever since and now has degenerative disk disease. "None of my health issues began until the day I started those injections," she said. "I have degenerative disk disease in the lower part of my back, exactly where there are two nodules that are between my muscle and my skin."

Yee said she also found a nodule in her stomach the size of a tennis ball and went back to the spa. She said she was stunned by the nurse's reaction.

"She looks at it and she's telling me 'oh my goodness that is so wonderful. All your fat cells have all congregated into one area. If all of our patients were like this, we'd be out of business because you know that fat's just going. You're the perfect person for this.'"

Disaster struck a few days later when that mass in her stomach nearly doubled to the size of a grapefruit. She had a life-threatening staph infection that required emergency surgery to remove a mass of dead tissue. Sheila says she could have died. "I contemplated going the next day. I might have died the next day. I might not have lived," she said. "They don't realize how serious this is and what they're doing to people. It's dangerous."

Doctors Warn Against Lipodissolve

Dr. Alan Gold, a member of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, warned against Lipodissolve. "The two primary chemicals within this are called PC and DC: phosphatidylcholine and deoxycholate," he explained. "There's no standardized formula and other things may be added to those mixtures. At the present time, it is not approved by the Food and Drug Administration."

There are other doctors who also warn against the use of Lipodissolve, such as Dr. Julius Few, a Chicago plastic surgeon who is a member of the [Injectable Safety Organization](#).

Few has treated more than a dozen patients with complications from Lipodissolve, including Hinton. "Whatever substance was injected basically caused the fat and the underlying tissue to die. And then that ultimately killed the skin," he said. "And it's much like what people have talked about with a flesh-eating infection. She will never look exactly the way she did before this treatment."

"20/20" brought hidden cameras to Pure Med Spa in St. Louis, the same spa Hinton visited, to find out how Lipodissolve is being sold. Three ABC staff members went in for consultations and were told they were good candidates for the procedure. The spa employees did warn about some of the temporary side effects of Lipodissolve, such as soreness and bloating in the injection site area. But when asked about other complications, spa employees said the procedure was safe, even telling us it that was approved by the FDA, which it is not. The first FDA approved study of Lipodissolve is only just starting.

Both Clark and Tate had their treatments done at the medi-spa chain FIG, which is now bankrupt. The company refused to comment to "20/20" about its former clients.

And what about Hinton? The medi-spa chain she visited for her Lipodissolve treatments, Pure Med Spa, wouldn't comment about her case or sit down for an interview. When we asked about the

misinformation given by its employees, officials e-mailed "20/20," saying, "We make every effort to assure that our employees are fully educated about the procedure, its potential benefits and side effects."

Hinton said Pure Med Spa refunded her money and offered to pay her medical bills, but she has hired a lawyer.

Yee said she was refunded \$3,500 from Advanced Lipo and Wellness Center, but the company wouldn't discuss her case with "20/20" either.

The spa's statement about Lipodissolve said, "As with any other injection, there is a risk of infection when the skin is broken. All prospective patients are made aware of risks & prior to treatment."

But Yee said she never expected her stomach would look like this. "Now I'm lopsided. I'm disfigured. There's dimpling on one side, lopsided. It's a mess."

Copyright © 2008 ABC News Internet Ventures