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Injections Don't Deliver On Promises To Melt Fat

(CBS) LOS ANGELES Can a series of injections help dissolve away your extra fat? That's what some medical clinics claim.

With a hidden camera we went to two medical clinics in Southern California to check out their promises to melt inches off your body with a series of injections. But we discovered hidden dangers.

"I look like I'm 4 months pregnant and I didn't look like that before. It all moved to the middle."

This woman we'll call Karen doesn't want to appear on camera. She's too embarrassed after paying thousands of dollars for LipoZap. The company claims a painless series of shots can zap inches off your body by breaking up the fat cells. But her bruises are still vivid seven months after she had the injections.

"I burned and itched for two and a half hours that night. I almost thought I was going to have to go to the emergency room."

For Karen, not only didn't it work, "I didn't lose one pound from it. Didn't lose one pant size, one top size, one bra size, nothing."

But she claims the fat from her love handles was zapped right to her stomach.

"It's like it all went down and forward," Karen says. "My stomach is bigger than before I started."

LipoZap is just one of several companies touting weight loss with a series of injections. The chemical is known as PCDC. A mixture of ingredients including lecithin and sodium. In Germany, it's marketed as lipostabil. It's become very controversial around the world and we found some companies aren't telling patients the whole story.

"You're welcome to come in."

We sent a producer in undercover to LipoZap in Sherman Oaks. She met with a consultant and nurse -- who told her the procedure is safe. The consultant even said she hasn't heard of any problems.

What she didn't say was that lipostabil is banned in Brazil because it hasn't been approved for use. Doctors in Canada have been ordered to stop using it for fat removal.

In California there's no prohibition against it.

But it's not approved by the FDA. The agency calls it "an unapproved drug for unapproved uses."

"I lost two pants sizes."

Fig is a nationwide chain selling what they call Lipo-Dissolve. We sent a producer in undercover to their new offices in Costa Mesa, where a consultant said it was safe.

She didn't say Fig's home office in Kansas was banned from administering the injections by the Kansas state medical board because it's unapproved.

The company was allowed to continue only after going to court to get the ban overturned.

And the St. Louis Better Business Bureau has received over 90 complaints against Fig from people who say it just doesn't work.

"In my hip."

Dr. Peter Fodor had a lipo injection as part of a study for the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. The study hasn't been completed--but for now the group has warned patients to steer clear of lipo injections.

"We get a lot of patients in our practices who have had miserable experiences," Dr. Fodor says. "There are patients who ended up with infections, emergency room visits and abscesses."

"Now it's emphasized right here."

Meanwhile, Karen doesn't think her disfigurement is going away.

"I'm going to have to seek medical care from a plastic surgeon and put out more money and hope that he can do something."

Both Fig and LipoZap refused to provide someone on camera to respond to our investigation. Fig emailed a statement saying in part that they've conducted more than 170,000 lipodissolve treatments nationwide. And their safety record is excellent.

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