



Are Fat-Dissolving Lipo Injections Safe? Yes -- and No

FDA: 'Buyer Beware' Situation



By Denise Dador

Sept. 10, 2007 (KABC-TV) - You've probably heard the ads -- an alternative to liposuction injections that dissolves fat. Sound too good to be true? The main ingredients of the shots are not FDA-approved. So is it safe and does it work? One local doctor says it can help, but consumers need to ask the right questions.

Thirty-four-year-old Lisa Gold had full-body liposuction a year ago. She said it left her body uneven.

"I just wanted to try to be the thinnest that I could be, but that surgery really screwed me up," said Gold.

Instead of more surgery, she opted for something that promised hardly any down time -- a fat-dissolving injection. It requires several injections in problem areas.

"You'll feel like somebody worked you out really hard at the gym," said Gold.

The main part of the injection is made of ingredients not FDA-approved -- phosphatidylcholine and deoxycholate (PCDC).

"The fat is broken down and it's absorbed by the body, and it's excreted mostly in the stool and urine," said lipotherapy specialist Dr. Raffi Dishakjian.

The injections are marketed under many names -- LipoZap, Lipo-Dissolve, and Lipomelt. Thirty-one-year-old Jenny Santoni had lipotherapy on her back.

"I feel better. I can wear tighter shirts," said Santoni.

"The looser the fat, the sort of buttery loose fat, tends to respond better than firm fat," said Dr. Dishakjian.

But like all procedures, it has risks. There have been complaints of infection, disfigurement, severe cramping, bloating, and dehydration.

In fact, in Kansas the procedure is restricted to physicians, and they must use it as part of an investigational trial.

Dr. Dishakjian says it's common to experience itching, redness, and sometimes bruising. He also says he tells his patients it's considered an off-label use, and says many of the serious complications are the result of poorly trained practitioners.

Consumers need to ask tough questions.

"They need to know the training of the physician, his technique, and how aggressive or safety-oriented the practice is," said Dr. Dishakjian. "Where do they get their supplies, and how many treatments has the doctor done, and in how many areas."

In response to a request by Eyewitness News, the FDA made this statement: "In fact, there are no FDA-approved drugs with an approved indication to dissolve fat. The FDA cannot assure the safety and efficacy of these types of drugs. Consumers need to know that this is a buyer-beware situation. These are unapproved drugs for unapproved uses and we can't guarantee consumers' safety."

Lisa knew the risks, but for her, it outweighed going another round with liposuction.

"I just want to be able to look in the mirror and like what I see," said Gold.

One more word of caution -- the doctor says lipotherapy should not be used as a weight-loss treatment. Rather, it's intended to help with small areas of body contouring.

The shots cost about \$250, and on average most people require at least four injections. Of course, that also depends on the size of the area being targeted.

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