

Cellulite: What it is and what you can do about it

Are you troubled by cellulite? Well, you're not alone. Learn about the science behind cellulite and how treatment options stack up

By Kyle Gordon



It's a simple case of geography. Dimples when you smile—adorable. But when they start appearing on other parts of the body, they're anything but cute—they're cellulite, a word no woman wants to take ownership of. Here, Canadian dermatologists uncover the truths behind this common and completely harmless skin condition.

What is cellulite, really?

The normal fat within our skin pushes through the network of connective tissue and creates these pockets of bulging fat. **As fat accumulates, it causes the skin to appear lumpy, rippled and even cottage cheese-like in texture.** "It's like taking a water balloon and putting it up against a net and pushing it," says Dr. Ian Landells, clinical chief of dermatology in St. John's, Newfoundland. "You could imagine that little bits of that balloon would push through the holes in the net, creating tiny bumps."

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Cellulite vs. fat

There is a difference between cellulite and fat. Fat insulates the body and protects the organs, nerves and muscles, while cellulite provides no padding and only occurs in certain areas on the body.

Ladies only

Sorry, ladies, but cellulite is for the most part a womanly problem, primarily targeting females over 35. It's most commonly seen on the upper legs and

buttocks, though some women do complain of cellulite on their tummy and upper arms. The reason: **women distribute fat differently than men.** We tend to have thicker layers of fat, particularly around the hips, and our skin is much thinner, allowing the fat to protrude more noticeably. This is not to say men don't have cellulite, but it tends to be less visible, says Dr. Landells.

How common is cellulite?

"Cellulite is extraordinarily common. Most women, if not all, have it to some degree," says Dr. Vince Bertucci, president of the Canadian Society for Dermatologic Surgery. It is believed that approximately **90 percent of women have cellulite.**

Does gaining weight cause cellulite?

"Weight is not necessarily a factor," says Dr. Bertucci. "You can have people who are very thin and still have cellulite. **Weight loss is not a treatment for cellulite.**" Although not fully understood, cellulite is thought to be caused by the protrusion of fat against the skin while the connective tissue holds down other parts of the skin, leading to a classic orange-peel appearance. Unlike fat cells that cause us to fluctuate in size, these stubborn cells cannot be burned as fuel. Therefore, dieting and exercise won't really help.

Treatment options for cellulite

According to Dr. Landells, there isn't a whole lot we can do. Creams claiming to reverse the appearance of cellulite tend to be less effective than we'd like. Endermologie, a vacuum-like suction and massage roller that plumps the skin to smooth out dimples, and VelaSmooth, infrared and conducted RF energies that heat the skin to increase the metabolism of stored energy and shrink the size of

the fat chamber, have not impressed Dr. Bertucci. Liposuction and Mesotherapy, injections of various chemicals such as phosphatidylcholine into the skin to disperse fat, have also proven a bust.

"This is an area of active investigation and there are a number of devices coming to the market that may be effective, but it's too early to tell," says Dr. Bertucci. "Cellulite is such a common thing, yet people become self-conscious and are willing to go to all lengths. Unfortunately, at this point in time, the promise holds more than the reality delivers."

Quick fixes for cellulite

Stop smoking. Studies suggest that smoking can weaken the skin and damage the connective tissue that causes the dimpling effect.
Toss the tight panties (we're talking Spanx here, ladies), which can limit blood flow. Instead, try a cotton thong to reduce the impact.
Try a body bronzer or tinted self-tanner to visually smooth out uneven skin.

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