



PHOTOS BY RON ALBERTSON, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Dr. Mohammad Sabouba, a Hamilton family doctor and former emergency room physician, offers a new procedure using an injection to break down fat. Want to be known as Hamilton's Dr. Lipodissolve, he told The Spectator in an interview. The procedure is a nonsurgical alternative to liposuction.

Jabthatflab

New procedure uses injection to attack and break down fat cells. It's the latest rage in body contouring. But skeptics warn it's not for everyone, and caution about the lack of studies on long-term effects.

BY CARMELINA PRETE

You look after yourself but still there's that part of your body you hate. Maybe it's the mommy paunch or flabby arms or waddle chin.

You wouldn't do anything as severe as surgery but would you poke yourself with a series of medicated injections that claim to melt away your flab?

Lipodissolve, the latest rage in cosmetic body contouring, is quickly gaining popularity in North America after years of use in Europe and Brazil.

A blitz of centres advertising the procedure opened in the United States within the year, attracting a flurry of headlines, most recently from celebrity gossip pages after Britney Spears was said to have started the injections in April in a bid to get her pre-mom body back.

The procedure that's getting Hollywood buzz is also available in Hamilton.

Dr. Mohammad Sabouba, a Hamilton family doctor and former emergency room physician, offers the procedure at his clinic, Hamilton Medical Aesthetics Centre on Upper James Street.

He took a training course in California through the International Meso-Lipotherapy Society and has offered it at his clinic for more than a year after learning about the procedure from a website.

"I want to be known as Hamilton's Dr. Lipodissolve," he said.

Lipodissolve, also known as flabjab, lipostabil, lipo-melt or fat-away, is marketed as a nonsurgical alternative to liposuction.

It involves several injections of a mixture of solutions into small areas of unwanted fat.

The fat cells are said to absorb the mixture, become inflamed and then harden before they break down and are excreted.

It usually cost \$200 to \$400 a treatment, with two to six sessions needed to get results.

This means the change in your appearance is gradual, which was precisely the appeal for one Hamilton woman.

"I figure if you can keep it a secret, keep it a secret. It takes away from the effect when someone compliments you if they know you didn't do it naturally."

Marilyn (not her real name), 28, says she began treatments to her stomach at Sabouba's clinic in January. She had her third and final treatment in April. She said her waist shrank from 27 inches to 25½. She was initially skeptical but gained confidence after her first treatment.

"I wanted to change my body type. I wanted spot reduction. This did it."

The results, she said, gave her straight, boyish figure some much-appreciated curves.



Dr. Mohammad Sabouba demonstrates a Lipodissolve injection at his Upper James Street clinic.

Facts

What: Lipodissolve
Who: Dr. Mohammad Sabouba
Where: Hamilton Medical Aesthetics Centre, 1050 Upper James St.
Contact: 905-575-5273 or www.575laser.com

For more information on Lipodissolve:

- International Mesotherapy Lipotherapy Society
www.aestheticcmd.com/imls
- The American Society of Nonsurgical Aesthetics (ASNA)
www.asal-meso.com
- Realself.com

Special considerations:

What to consider when consulting a doctor about lipodissolve:

■ Review the doctor's credentials, education, training, type of certification held, and the number of times that the treatment has been performed in the practice.

■ View before-and-after photos of patients with similar conditions who received lipodissolve and alternative treatments such as liposuction.

■ Ask about the ingredients in the medication and the amount of medication to be used in the procedure.

■ Ask the doctor to estimate the number of treatments required to achieve and maintain the benefit.

■ Ask about any possible interactions with your medical conditions or medications you are already taking or plan to take.

— Source: Alan Matarasso in *Consumer Guide to Plastic Surgery*
yourplasticsurgeryguide.com

"I feel like Marilyn Monroe. It's great." So what's the catch? For starters, it doesn't work for everyone.

Sabouba stresses this is not a procedure to treat obesity. Your body mass index (a measure of body fat based on height and weight) should not exceed 30.

A BMI of 18.5 to 24.9 is considered normal weight while 25 to 29.9 is considered overweight. Ideally, it is meant for people like Marilyn who are at a healthy weight but have stubborn pockets of localized fat.

Secondly, nobody knows what the long-term effects are or what metabolic impact the procedure has on the liver or other organs because there's a

lack of studies in those areas, said Dr. Alan Matarasso, a New York City plastic surgeon and spokesperson for the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

"I'm cautiously optimistic," he said. "It's human nature to want a nonsurgical procedure. I'd want it myself if it was going to give you the same results. But there's no free ride. If this was replacing liposuction, we'd all be doing it."

Liposuction is a proven way to permanently remove fat. With lipodissolve, there are no such guarantees.

That's why respected Burlington plastic surgeon Dr. Otto Weiglein won't do it.

"It hurts like hell and there's a great

degree of unpredictability (with results)," he said.

None of the 10 cosmetic surgery doctors listed in Hamilton's Yellow Pages offers Lipodissolve, although two say they are either thinking about it or plan to offer it in the future.

The main ingredient in the Lipodissolve formula is phosphatidylcholine (made from soy and modelled after naturally occurring substances in cell membranes). It is dissolved in a bile salt called deoxycholate, where it helps break down fat cells, according to the American Society of Aesthetic Lipodissolve.

A Health Canada spokesperson said phosphatidylcholine is authorized for use as a nutritional dietary supplement but not as an injection for fat removal. But that doesn't preclude a doctor from using it "off-label," which means for a purpose outside the scope of the drug's approved label.

It's a similar situation in the U.S. where all the ingredients have FDA-approval, but the procedure itself does not. Matarasso, the N.Y. plastic surgeon, said government approval of ingredients means nothing. "Well, all the products that make dynamite are FDA approved but that doesn't mean the mixture is safe."

In May, The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery issued a public warning against the use of injection fat-loss treatments, stating these procedures are scientifically unproven, and lack any objective data on safety and efficacy. The American Society of Aesthetic Lipodissolve rebutted, stating the ingredients are

safe, that more than 50,000 treatment sessions have been reported in European and American peer reviewed journals demonstrating improvement in 90 per cent of patients.

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Alicia Joleen wished she had just gotten liposuction.

The 28-year-old married mother of two from Missouri watched the commercials advertising a new lipodissolve centre promoting losing fat without surgery and no downtime.

"All these women (in the commercial) seemed so happy," she said. "I thought, Wow, this will be amazing!"

She went last June and paid \$2,400 to get her stomach done. Her BMI was between 31 and 35 — higher than Sabouba's BMI limit in offering the procedure. Joleen had 14 injections, seven on each side. It felt like a tingle at first but within 15 minutes she felt a burning sensation that felt like she had been attacked by bees.

Still, she'd endure it if it meant the pouch she had been self-conscious about for so many years would flatten. "I had high hopes," she said. "I was expecting to wear different clothes. I thought if I could get rid of that fat, I wouldn't feel so self-conscious."

Instead, she was left severely bruised after injections that left her feeling "like aliens had invaded my stomach."

Although she paid for 12 sessions, she stopped at six because she was so disappointed with the results. Her stomach has been left lumpy and looks far worse than before. She applied for a refund and turned to Internet forums such as RealSelf.com to warn other women about her experience.

Sabouba is aware of the backlash, which is why he's careful not to administer the injections to anyone over the BMI limit.

"I don't want to have a bad reputation," said Sabouba, who has done about 80 Lipodissolve procedures. "It works when it's done right."

The Journal of Drugs in Dermatology reported in its October 2003 issue that the use of phosphatidylcholine to treat small areas of localized fat is safe, low cost and effective. The study examined 205 patients who used the injections for fat on their thighs, hips, abdomen or face. Each had anywhere from one to five treatments, with about a two-week interval between sessions, using no more than 10 mL per session. Side-effects included bruising and itching.

Matarasso, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons spokesperson, said in the long run it may give doctors another tool to offer patients in body contouring but liposuction remains the gold standard.

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