

FASHION ALEXA

Women are zapping their faces with radio waves instead of plastic surgery

By Dana Wood

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Remodeling: It isn't just for '90s-era kitchens anymore. By harnessing the power of radio frequency and ultrasound technology, skin experts are zapping below the epidermal surface, "remodeling" tissue to stimulate the production of collagen and elastin. The process results, they claim, in tighter, more youthful looking jawlines and necks. The best part (at least according to fans)? Because the procedures are noninvasive, there's little to no downtime.

Both techniques use energy — a.k.a. heat — to smooth fine lines and firm contours. They're also deployed to de-jiggle pudgy bellies and wobbly thighs, and soften creasing in the décolletage area.

There are three main types of radio-frequency (RF) treatments: monopolar, bipolar and multipolar. They differ by the degree of skin penetration, and practitioners choose a system based on the body part and intensity of repair. Mono dives deepest — up to 20 millimeters below the epidermis. (Back in 2010, Demi Moore was rumored to be spending a whopping \$150,000 per year on Thermage, the best-known monopolar treatment.)

Bipolar options, like VelaShape, perform their magic in the 2-to-4 millimeter range. And new multipolar treatments, such as TriPollar, claim to work so superficially they can trigger a flattening of even the lightest lines and wrinkles.

Ultrasound, meanwhile, uses a different type of direct energy, allowing practitioners to deliver a precise mini-bolt and see exactly where it's landing. New York dermatologist Melanie Grossman has been using Ultherapy, the biggie in this category, for six years. "It's pretty revolutionary," she says. "I think it's the only noninvasive way to really lift and tighten the skin."

At his Manhattan practice, skin doc Paul Jarrod Frank doubles down, addressing laxity on the face and body with the new Exilis Ultra, the first device to combine RF and ultrasound. "The ultrasound penetrates deeper to tighten muscle as well, so the combo of superficial and deep-tissue tightening is ideal," he says. With as few as one to two treatments on the face, or three to four on the body, he says he can tighten skin and reduce fat.

Frank notes that the best candidate for this style of treatment is 35 to 50 years old and in pretty decent shape to begin with. "Patients with moderate to severe loose skin will not benefit," he says. "These technologies are great, but they make subtle differences. I often use them in combination with injectables."

And while some skin pros say that too many tightening treatments can hollow the face and make a patient look older, the doctors interviewed for this story say that's unlikely to happen under the care of qualified, board-certified physicians.

Even so, New York plastic surgeon Adam Kolker cautions that for every success story there are patients who see only minimal change. And the effects of these procedures, which range in price from \$1,000 to \$4,000, can also be fleeting. "There's an immediate skin tightening, but it doesn't last," warns Kolker. "But there are plenty of people who either can't have, don't want or aren't ready for surgery. There are some who are very happy with these nonsurgical modalities."

In other words, everyone has their own approach to saving face.

At-Home Helper



EndyMed

EndyMed, a purveyor of dermatologist-grade RF machines, has now harnessed its “3DEEP” skin-tightening technology into Newa, a miniaturized DIY version — the first of its kind to be granted FDA clearance for home use. While not as powerful as a pro-level jolt of radio frequency, two brief sessions a week will restore four years of collagen within three months, according to the company. Not bad for a little chez vous zipping and zapping.