

BYRDIE

I Tried the New Body-Contouring Device Emsculpt, and Now I Have Actual Abs

Everyone has a certain body part they tend to fixate on. Mine has always been my stomach. Some people gain weight to their thighs or butt or arms, but for me, any time I tend to really let myself go (which, to be honest, is often—my affair with pasta is probably my longest-standing relationship), I'll look down and see what can only be described as a soft and bloaty situation. As someone whose exercise routine can best be described as lackadaisical and infrequent, I've more or less given up on having a stomach that resembles anything close to EmRata status. Thus, when I got an email about a brand-new FDA-cleared body-contouring treatment called [BTL Emsculpt](#) that promises to not only burn fat but also build muscle in the ab area, I threw down my cacio e pepe mid-bite and set up an appointment immediately.



I arrived at the office of NYC cosmetic dermatologist [Paul Jarrod Frank](#) (who counts Madonna as a client—enough said), one of the first five dermatologists to receive the Emsculpt device in the entire country, who explained to me how exactly Emsculpt works. “Emsculpt is a new category of device,” he tells me. “For the first time ever, we’re therapeutically using magnetic fields. It’s basically like a mini MRI machine.” The non-invasive HIFEM (high-intensity focused electromagnetic) technology induces 20,000 supramaximal muscle contractions in 30 minutes. What exactly does that mean? **“This is able to affect the muscle in a way that you couldn’t do voluntarily,”** Frank explains. **“When you do a crunch or a squat, you’re activating about 50% of that muscle group every three to five seconds. This is activating 100% of the muscle 20,000 times in a 30-minute period.”** The idea of lying still for 30 minutes and getting the definition and fat-burning effect of 20,000 crunches sounded too good to be true, but you can’t argue with facts. According to the studies done on Emsculpt, the device is able to create about 15% muscle development on the area it was used on after four treatments spaced two weeks apart. Frank says that it works because you’re dramatically increasing the metabolic rate of what’s going on around the muscle and with the “hypercontraction of the muscle, the fatty acids on the muscle cells leak out.” Hence he says you’ll see 15% fat burn on top of the muscle building. So unlike CoolSculpting or SculpSure treatments in which you’re targeting the fat directly, the fat-burn effect from Emsculpt is more of a residual effect from what the device is doing to your muscles.



As for who is the best candidate for Emsculpt, Frank recommends it for anyone who is health-conscious and exercises but is looking for that extra definition that their SoulCycle classes just aren't delivering—the icing on the cake. If you're deciding between Emsculpt and something like CoolSculpting or SculpSure, he says it depends on your goal: If you're more concerned about getting rid of fat, then CoolSculpting or SculpSure might be the way to go, and then you could follow with Emsculpt for toning and muscle definition. "Although this does help with fat, if you have a major gut, it will be a waste of time," he says. For now, the device has been approved to be used on the butt and abs, though Frank says there could be smaller versions of the machine in the future to be used on different parts of the body therapeutically or as rehabilitation medicine.

The actual process is relatively painless. The device straps on over your stomach area (or butt area), and then a practitioner turns up the power. Frank says that they'll usually start at lower power, and then work their way up because going directly to 80% or 100% can hyperstress the muscle and even cause a hernia, which, he says, is why you probably won't find an Emsculpt device in your local Equinox anytime soon. You'll need a trained practitioner who knows exactly how to handle the device. The contractions occur a few seconds apart and feel strange—like a super-intense vibration that reaches your very core. It was slightly uncomfortable during my first treatment and got better and easier with each one. Your feet will lift up with every contraction, so you know it's definitely working. After a few contractions, the machine will switch over to a tapping motion to help break up the lactic acid that's being released by your muscles. I couldn't believe how quickly it breezed by. The next day, my stomach area was slightly sore, like after a particularly intense Pilates class.



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I went back for three more treatments spaced a few weeks apart and waited for my sculpted abs to make their entrance. Two weeks went by and nothing. What did happen is that I was finally able to achieve Crow Pose during a Y7 yoga class. Yoga is pretty much the only form of exercise I ever do or enjoy, but my practice is sporadic, and I know my limits: I usually leave any sort of inversion or move that involves balancing on your hands with your legs lifted to the air to my more skilled counterparts. So imagine my surprise when I attempted Crow Pose—a move where you lean forward on your hands, lift your legs up and rest your knees on your back elbows—and was actually able to balance on my hands for a good 10 seconds. I was shocked. I have never even come close to doing a move like this, and I knew it was because of Emsculpt. **“My biggest referral sources are my SoulCycle instructors, nutritionists, professional trainer-type patients,”** Frank says. **“There’s nothing more frustrating than hitting a workout plateau. A lot of my patients feel that their whole core is stronger after doing Emsculpt, and they’re able to reach the next level of their fitness journey.”**

A few more weeks went by, and I more or less gave up on seeing any sort of visible result from Emsculpt, aside from feeling stronger in my yoga practice. I chalked it up to the fact that I wasn't the ideal patient Frank described. Because I did have more fat around my stomach area and didn't exercise all the time, perhaps I shouldn't have expected visible results that were promised. Then, one day I looked in the mirror and literally did a double take. Could it be? Could those be faint outlines of muscle definition I was seeing in my stomach area? Could they be... abs? It was like one day I woke up and my stomach area was visibly smaller and more toned. My body shape has always been more straight-up-and-down than anything curvy, but suddenly, my waist appeared smaller and I had more of an hourglass shape. The white Reformation jeans that I usually only wear once a year because they're so constricting in the waist area felt more comfortable. It wasn't like I was suddenly slipping them on, but there was a noticeable difference in how tight it felt to button the top button. I felt more confident in my swimsuit, wearing a cropped top, and being naked. It's not like I suddenly woke up with a six-pack, but it was undeniable: **Emsculpt had worked, and my stomach area was tighter and more toned than it had ever been in my life.**

So down to the logistics. An Emsculpt session will usually cost around \$1000, which doesn't make it all that attainable for most people. But Frank explains that the actual machine itself is a \$250,000 MRI machine, which explains the cost. If you're already spending hundreds on a gym membership or workout classes, it could be the one thing that helps you overcome your workout plateau. Or if you're like me and don't work out often but still try to live a healthy lifestyle and just want something to help with sculpting in the stomach or butt area, I can attest to the fact that the treatment is worth it and you will see noticeable results. At the end of the day, this is a revolutionary treatment that will only become more commonplace as more people try it and hear about it. **"This is going to do for body what Botox did for the face in the '90s,"** Frank predicts. **"It's really going to change the game for medical and cosmetic applications. Body is the new face."**

You can learn more about Emsculpt and book an appointment with Paul Jarrod Frank on [his website](#).

The author received complimentary Emsculpt treatments in exchange for an honest review.