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# The skinny on cellulite

by Cheryl Fenton | June 13, 2011



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It's the bane of almost everybody (and every body). Ninety percent of women have it. Yes, even the really skinny ones.

Cellulite. Just the mention of the dreaded C word may cause your stress level to rise as high as summer's hems. But what exactly is that orange-peel-like dimpling that we bemoan every bikini season?

"Cellulite is the dimpled appearance caused by fat deposits just below the [skin] surface," says Aurora Peritz, spa manager at **Equinox** (225 Franklin Street, Boston, 617.426.2140), which offers a cellulite-fighter wrap (\$155). "The causes aren't well understood, but heredity is one of the strongest factors. Individuals' genes are largely responsible for determining if and where they may develop cellulite." Thanks for the gift, Mom. We would have rather had new shoes.

But to be fair, it's not all her fault. Hormones like estrogen play an important role in cellulite development, explaining why men are generally cellulite-free (lucky bastards).

"Human skin exposed to estrogen tends to create cellulite," explains dermatologist Dr. David Goldberg of **Skin Laser & Surgery Specialists** (18 Newbury Street, Boston, 857.277.7746), which offers VelaShape, Accent, and Viora machines to help diminish the appearance of cellulite. "A baby girl at birth can have cellulite because of her mother's estrogen. Then the cellulite disappears, only to return at adolescence."

So is cellulite treatable? Not really. The bottom line is that it's usually there to stay. "If cellulite was actually treatable, we wouldn't see [it in] pics of celebrities who spend big money on beauty," says Christine Perkins, owner of **Pyara Spa and Salon** (104 Mt. Auburn Street, Cambridge,

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617.497.9300).

But there are ways to decrease its visibility. It's believed that cellulite may be especially prevalent in those with unhealthy lifestyles - think smokers, drinkers, sedentary types, and people with poor diets. "Although thin people aren't immune, obese people are more prone to cellulite," Peritz says. "In an overweight body, fat accumulation pushes cellulite in the subcutaneous layer outward and worsens its appearance."

"No diet will completely get rid of all cellulite," explains Brookline-based registered dietitian Janel Ovrut. "But there are dietary strategies to lessen its appearance or prevent future cellulite."

Staying hydrated is a good start. Well-hydrated skin looks smoother, masking the appearance of any cellulite lumps. Ovrut steers people toward water-rich foods, like fruits and vegetables. "They are also high in vitamin C, which prevents collagen breakdown. With collagen breakdown, your skin loses elasticity, which can show signs of cellulite more." Choose vitamin C-rich citrus fruits, strawberries, red bell peppers, sweet potatoes, and leafy dark-green vegetables. She also suggests getting healthy fats from avocados, walnuts, almonds, seeds, salmon, and flax to keep skin supple.

And, surprise, surprise, you may have to get off your butt to have a nice one. "You can diminish the appearance of cellulite with regular exercise, especially strength training," agrees Peritz. "A good strength-training program increases your chances of maintaining lean muscle as you get older, reducing your chances of increasing the size of your fat cells."

Massage may also help in the cellulite fight, increasing circulation and draining toxins for smoother skin. "Cellulite is the way our bodies hold onto

toxins and fluid," says Perkins. "Massage helps to minimize the look of it by pushing toxins through the body. The result is temporary, so the more it's pushed through with regular massage, the better the appearance."

Then there are the legions of at-home cellulite creams. Don't expect them to deliver long-term miracles (some pros, like Dr. Goldberg and Perkins, even question their validity altogether). But such creams may increase circulation, hydrating and swelling skin for a temporary tightness. The most popular ingredients are caffeine, ginseng, and green tea.

That first ingredient also features in a less-expected home treatment: the Wacoal iPant. Available for \$60 at **Nordstrom Natick Collection** (290 Speen Street, Natick, 508.318.2600), this thin undergarment is embedded with caffeine and vitamin E microcapsules for all-day smoothing of trouble spots. But Peritz forgoes such products in favor of her own DIY cellulite fighter: strong ground coffee, rubbed in circles on dampened cellulite areas for one minute and then rinsed.

In the end, it's all about maintaining a good balance with diet, exercise, and a little pampering. "A good healthy lifestyle and exercise will lessen cellulite," says Dr. Goldberg. "By keeping the skin and muscles healthy, the cellulite in between doesn't become that obvious." Finally, you can put cellulite behind you.

*Cheryl Fenton is a freelance writer who also blogs at [EasyPeasyBlog.com](http://EasyPeasyBlog.com).*

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