

Health & Fitness

Machine that's flab-bergasting

THE FEELGOOD FACTOR

THE VACUNAUT

What is it? A super-advanced, "active" fat-burning treatment, achieved by exercising while wearing a special, close-fitting neoprene suit, inside which a vacuum is created against the stomach and hips.

What does it claim to do? Achieve what for many people is the Holy Grail of diet-and-exercise regimes: targeted spot reduction of the stomach. A programme of three treatments a week for four weeks is recommended; over two months, the average loss from stomach and hips is 10 inches.

High-profile fans include Robbie Williams, who used to use the machine at Club Kensington and now has one at home; "Rob swears by it," says Chris Heath in *Feel*, his biography of Williams. "Most days he appears in his suit, like an eccentric spaceman, asking to be zipped up or unzipped."

Any science to it? Spot-reduction has, in the past, been considered impossible: when you exercise, conventional theory goes, the body will burn fat stores from all over. But research has identified that during exercise, fat is metabolised first from areas with the best blood supply and highest temperature, which tend to leave the stomach (plus the buttocks and thighs) until last.

Exerting a variable vacuum pressure on the stomach tissue increases blood flow to the area.

Hence, for the duration of the Vacunaut exercise session, fat will be metabolised from the stomach and hips, and used to fuel the working muscles.

What does it feel like? Quite extraordinary. The airtight neoprene bodysuit is like a



Fat-busting: Alice Hart-Davis

shortie wetsuit with a midriff of giant bubble-wrap, and you need to be helped into it.

Then the fun starts. Slim hosepipes are attached to the valves on the front of the suit, which suck air out of the midriff section around the stomach and hips. It feels peculiar, like being repeatedly trapped in a bubble-wrap corset.

Next, you walk on the treadmill, at enough of a pace to get your heart-rate up to 129 beats per minute (the optimum zone for metabolising and burning fat).

Thanks to the big suit, which feels like armoured rubber, and the breathable inner-skin suit which must be worn beneath it, I'm soon pouring with sweat — and you still need to keep going for 40 minutes. One session isn't enough to get noticeable results — but I can believe that it works.

Where to find it: At Club Kensington, 201 Kensington High Street, W8 (020 7938 5455). £550 for 12 sessions. For more details and other studios, call 0800 731 1323 or visit www.vacunaut.co.uk

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