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Cream found effective in reducing fat

Asthma remedy could prove safer than liposuction, researchers say

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE – A teaspoon a day seems to have taken the fat away from women's thighs, according to researchers experimenting with a cream made from an over-the-counter asthma remedy.

The research, conducted by a group that includes a distinguished obesity researcher, drew both skepticism and enthusiasm from those who heard it described at a scientific meeting this week.

"It was a very interesting and very preliminary report," but "it's not yet cause for excitement," said Patrick M. O'Neil, director of the Weight Management Center at the Medical University of South Carolina. He said questions remain about whether the cream is truly reducing fat and whether its effects will persist. But he immediately began making arrangements to obtain some of the cream to conduct his own tests.

The researchers studied only a small group

of women, who are more likely to have fat in the lower body than are men, who are more prone to abdominal fat. It is also known that women have trouble losing weight in their thighs, because abdominal fat is burned up first, researchers said.

Researchers said that if the cream works, it would provide a safer alternative to liposuction.

Its effects would be primarily cosmetic because fat in the hips and thighs is not of great importance to health. Numerous studies have shown that health risks are associated mostly with abdominal fat.

The cream has been patented and licensed to an entrepreneur, said one of its developers, Dr. Frank Greenway of the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles.

Dr. Greenway said he shares the patent with one of his collaborators, Dr. George Bray, a noted obesity researcher and director of Louisiana State University's Penning-

ton Biomedical Research Center.

The research was described at the meeting of the North American Association for the Study of Obesity, an organization of academic scientists doing research on causes and treatments for obesity.

The cream's active ingredient is aminophylline, an asthma remedy available in pill form without prescription, Dr. Greenway said.

He said the cream was studied in two groups of 12 women. Every day, each woman had a teaspoon of the cream applied to one thigh, and an inactive cream applied to the other.

The cream reduced thigh size even in women who didn't lose weight, Dr. Greenway said. Researchers believe, but have not yet proven, that the result is due to loss of fat. The cream probably wouldn't work on fat elsewhere in the body, because it relies on unique properties of fat cells in thighs, Dr. Greenway said.

The article EM9342 reprinted above is used in Figure 12.17 of the STAT 221 Course Materials and in Chapter 7 of the STAT 231 Course Materials.