

Devil's Advocate: HYPOXI

IN A WORLD THAT ADVOCATES 'INTENSITY, INTENSITY, INTENSITY', CAN WE REALLY BUDGE THE STUBBORN BODY FAT WITH A LIGHT CYCLE WHILE WATCHING THE LATEST EPISODE OF GAME OF THRONES? THAT IS THE QUESTION POSED BY THE NEW TECHNOLOGY THAT IS HYPOXI. WE ASKED OUR IN-HOUSE JOURNALIST KATELYN SWALLOW TO GIVE IT A GO AND HAD THE EXPERTS WEIGH IN.

THE SUBJECT

As a gym bunny who sips from a fluoro shaker six days a week, I'm no stranger to exercise. I eat clean (80 per cent of the time – because, pizza), lift heavy and incorporate at least three (dreaded) high-intensity cardio sessions per week.

Despite my dedication, my lower body has always been a 'trouble' area: a flatter stomach offset by thicker thighs, a larger bum (although that's 'in' now, right?) and 'child bearing' hips, as my mother so eloquently puts it. For me, gaining muscle is relatively easy, but the gains are often covered with a coat of hard-to-budge fat. And although I've come to embrace my curves over the years, a longing to 'lean out' has always been there. Which made Hypoxi – with its promises of targeted fat-loss using low-impact exercise – seem like the edge my anti-cardio brain was looking for.

THE SCIENCE

One of the first elements of the Hypoxi system I appreciated was their use of the terminology the 'Hypoxi method' rather than simply 'Hypoxi'. That is, this was not about sitting on the couch and watching the inches magically drop away; it was about a systematic combination of healthy nutrition, consistent (albeit low-effort) training and vacuum and compression technology. The

basic foundations of good health (eat well and exercise) were not completely done away with, only added to.

There are a total of four Hypoxi machines available to clients, including the two most commonly used by women – the L250 and S120. Both machines see you lightly pedalling on an exercise bike while air is pumped in and out of the machine at varying pressures. The idea is that the vacuum intervals and the heat produced encourage increased blood flow to the hips, buttocks and thighs, leading to fat loss from those areas. Clients of Hypoxi are encouraged to exercise at pace that sees them sit within the so-called ‘fat burning zone’, where the body opts for a greater percentage of fat over carbohydrates for fuel – think about 65 per cent of your maximum heart rate or a low-intensity pedal.

Another notch in the Hypoxi-method belt is the dermology machine. Based on the ancient Chinese practice of cupping, it’s basically a bodysuit designed to stimulate the lymphatic system through massage and pressure. Touted as a way to ‘prep’ the body before the main Hypoxi session, the suit aims to reduce fluid retention, increase tone and reduce the appearance of cellulite.

Like most exercise plans, Hypoxi self-admittedly relies on an accompanying healthy menu. You can’t out-train a bad diet, as the saying goes. Specifically, they suggest a healthy meal one to two hours before your session and then refraining from eating at all for two hours post-visit. Even then, forget the cheese toasties – Hypoxi suggests refraining from carbohydrates for a further two to four hours to ensure maximum results.

THE EXPERIENCE

My first Hypoxi treatment concluded a solid six-week break from hard training due to a lingering virus. I was feeling lethargic, bloated and all-round not myself. It was time to get back on the fitness bandwagon.

My initial meeting involved a quick measure, a weigh-in and a run-through of what was involved. Given my preoccupation with my lower region, in particular my legs and the cellulite spotting my hamstring area, the Hypoxi specialist suggested using a combination of the dermology and L250 and S120 machines. Twenty minutes in the dermology suit and a further 30 minutes in one of the two machines meant that I was in and out of the studio within an hour.

The actual process – although relaxing – feels a bit like being part of an alien experiment. First stop – the space suit that is dermology. Lying on your back and covered from neck to toe, air is pumped in and out of the suit while the skin is massaged. While I wouldn’t want to be claustrophobic (the suit is fairly tight to ensure [that] no air escapes), 20 minutes in this thing left me feeling as relaxed as I would after yoga. I fell asleep more than once.

Second stop: into the machines. A thermometer is placed around your upper thigh and a heart rate monitor just under your rib cage. You are then zipped into what can only be described as one of the ugliest ‘skirts’ you have ever seen, which fits neatly into the base of the machine itself so that air can be effectively pumped around your lower body as you cycle. The only thing left to do is sit back, pedal and relax, ensuring [that] your heart rate stays within the specified zones. While the exertion never exceeded a light puff, the heat produced by the vacuum technology works up a lower-body sweat. Don’t skip the water bottle.



Hypoxi dermology and L250 machines



The Hypoxi ‘skirt’ is fitted before entering the machines



Journalist Katelyn Swallow in the Hypoxi dermology machine

THE RESULTS

Participating in three Hypoxi sessions per week over one month saw me lose a total of 27.5 cm from my lower body, with no change in my scale weight. In particular, my hips lost a total of seven cm and my legs a total of 4.5 cm. Looking at before and after pictures, I can also see a fairly large reduction in the appearance of cellulite on the back of my legs and on my glutes.

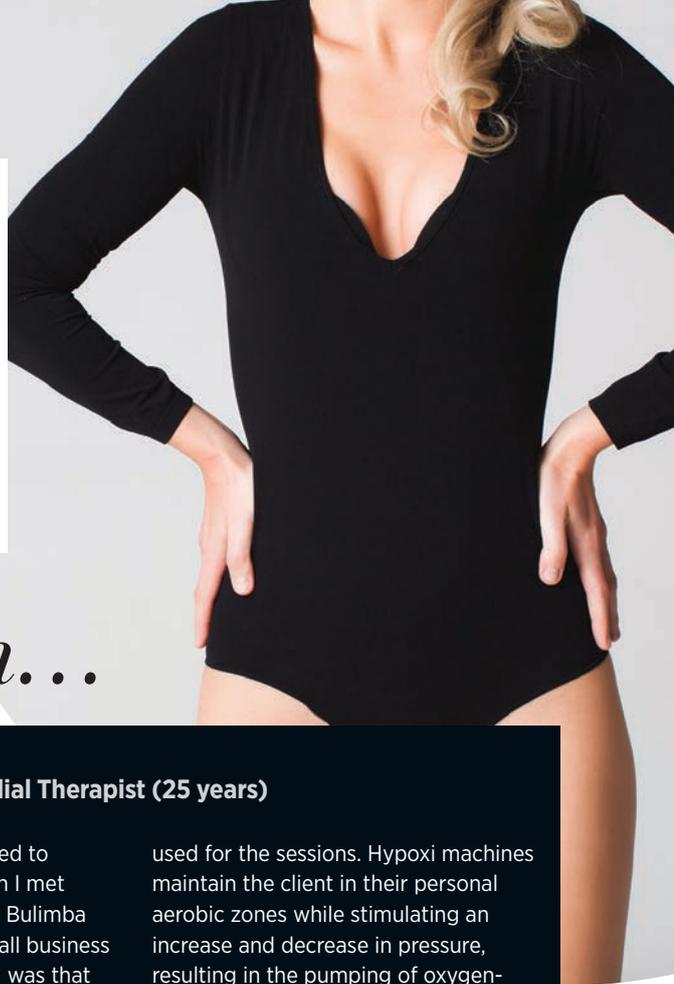
The pros? Obviously, the results. But an added bonus was the low-impact nature of the sessions, which meant it doubled as a therapy session. After a busy day at work, a 20-minute massage and a light half-hour cycle while watching some trash TV was exactly what I needed. The ease of the system also meant that on days when I was feeling unmotivated or simply tired, I could still incorporate an effective workout without touching a dumbbell.

On the flip side, it’s important to remember that for most of the month, I continued my regular fitness routine – Hypoxi was simply a

support. That said, the results were much faster than any I'd experienced.

The changes to my daily routine also took some getting used to. A full hour on top of my weight training or cardio session was a big commitment while working full time. Additionally, trying to work meals around the Hypoxi treatment was a struggle: late-night sessions often meant no dinner before bed. The 6am sessions meant skipping my morning coffee and going without my slice of rye bread for brekkie.

In the end, at \$38 to \$69 per session (or \$69 to \$138 per session if you opt for dermatology as well), and a three-hour time commitment per week, I think that anyone considering it would need to seriously appraise the value of fast-tracked results versus the costs. For those not suffering from injury, physique goals can be achieved through proper diet and exercise (without the hefty price tag) – they just might take a little longer. Which begs the question: whose clock are you on, anyway?



The experts weigh in...

MARIA RIVIERA

Accredited Exercise Physiologist

In short, the most effective way to achieve sustainable weight loss is through well-balanced nutrition and regular exercise. That being said, when participating in conventional exercise, you can't control where you lose fat – 80 per cent of women find it extremely difficult to shift fat from their hips, thighs and buttocks, despite drops in overall body fat percentage. Each of you have a specific genetic make-up that determines where fat cells are stored – and that is where Hypoxi can be helpful.

By using compression technology combined with conventional exercise, more targeted fat loss and cellulite reduction is possible. The high- and low-pressure vacuum therapy focuses on treating the mid to lower body by stimulating blood flow to problem areas such as the stomach, hips, thighs and buttocks. This promotes the transportation of fatty acids away from those areas, towards the exercising muscles. By increasing circulation to those areas, the fatty acids, fluids and toxins are then flushed out of the body through sweat.

Hypoxi can be helpful to those with particular injuries, for those new to exercise or for those who struggle to stay motivated. Hypoxi sessions are fairly short (usually about 30 minutes), low impact and the results are accelerated compared to participating in conventional exercise alone. Ideally, you would also be incorporating a regular exercise routine – including both cardiovascular and resistance training sessions – on the 'non Hypoxi days', and a nutritionally sound diet. This should be a holistic approach rather than a quick fix.

To my knowledge, the risks involved are no greater than those associated with performing any other type of exercise.

MATHEW BAKER

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The first time I was introduced to the Hypoxi system was when I met Siobhan White, from Hypoxi Bulimba and Newstead, at a local small business meeting. My first impression was that it seemed like an expensive weight-loss scam and I was intrigued by their claims that the technology could be used to help athletes recover from exercise and, in some cases, assist in soft tissue injury repair.

There seemed to be plenty of research surrounding fat loss around the thighs, buttocks and stomach following Hypoxi treatments: a recent independent study conducted by the University of Hamburg concluded that Hypoxi results in clients losing three times more fat from problem areas when compared to participation in conventional exercise alone. The Hypoxi website also claims that clinical trials of vacuum therapy have been conducted as early as 1997, with similar results.

Any good scientist would start questioning elements such as how the control group was split and measured and how the groups of subjects differed in mean body measurements and exercise and nutrition habits.

With these questions in mind, I sought a function of the machines that couldn't be discriminated against and found that one area that could be tested was the increase in blood flow and the regulated heart rate zones

used for the sessions. Hypoxi machines maintain the client in their personal aerobic zones while stimulating an increase and decrease in pressure, resulting in the pumping of oxygen- and nutrient-enriched blood to specific areas and helping the body to function more efficiently.

Hypoxi was already being used as a recovery method in sportspeople and athletes, including Olympic triathlon silver medallist Michellie Jones. By increasing the supply of oxygen- and nutrient-enriched blood to damaged tissue, cell activity is increased, resulting in regeneration of muscle and tissue. This got me thinking: if recovery time can be reduced dramatically in athletes, then why shouldn't it also be able to help those with injuries?

I went on a mission to use the Hypoxi system to help my patients with chronic pain, aiming to reduce pain and inflammation and increase the opportunity for the body to recover.

I trialled Hypoxi on a client with a lumbar disc impingement, an elite triathlete seeking better recovery and a client recovering from a knee reconstruction. All patients responded positively to the treatment, with a decrease in pain, improved performance and a reduction in delayed onset muscle soreness reported. I have used the system to enhance my client treatments ever since. ■