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Many use colonics
to jump-start
weight loss but
does this trend
have staying
power?

GUT CHECK

BY CHERYL V. JACKSON
Staff Reporter

Chicago media relations professional Rashanda Hall was turning 29 and wanted to get something out of her system.

Colonics — also called colon therapy, colon cleansing, colon irrigation and colon hydrotherapy — caught her interest. Especially appealing to her were the prospects of clearer skin and a chance to kick start some weight loss.

With that, she and some girlfriends looked into the procedure — an extended form of an enema that gets rid of waste and impurities built up in the lower intestine — as a means to celebrate her big day last September.

At less than \$75, the price was right. “We spend more than that on massages,” Hall said.

She’s one of a growing number of people who are looking to colonics to lose weight. Folks are turning to colon therapy to flush their systems, thereby dropping some pounds. But such motivation troubles some medical experts, who say the procedure should be used for its overall health benefits — rather than a quick way to lose some weight.

Celebrities using colonics have helped the procedure garner mainstream attention, said Dick Hoenninger, executive director of the San Anto-



Alyce Sorokie, owner of Partners in Wellness, says the number of procedures she's done this year is up 20 percent. —

JOHN H. WHITE/SUN-TIMES

nio-based International Association for Colon Hydrotherapy, which has seen its membership of therapists grow from 116 to 1,600 over the past five years. Therapist Web sites tout the likes of Matt Damon, Ben Affleck, Demi Moore and Usher as being colonics devotees.

WGCI radio personality Sam Sylk got lots of calls and e-mails when he told listeners he lost about 20 pounds — down from 289 — last summer after three treatments, in conjunction with exercise and watching his diet.

“We have to get over the notion of the procedure being done, which is not painful. And you understand it’s for health reasons,” Sylk said in an interview.

During the procedure, which takes 45 to 55 minutes, a therapist inserts a scope into the rectum to deliver water as the stomach is massaged. A person can have five to 10 pounds of fecal matter removed with the first colonic, Hoenninger says. Proponents tout it as a way to rid the body of impurities,

leading to weight loss, as well as reducing signs of aging, increasing energy and relieving chronic diseases such as diabetes and arthritis.

Alyce Sorokie, owner of Partners in Wellness, 1967 N. Dayton, and author of *Gut Wisdom: Understanding and Improving Your Digestive Health* (Career Press, 2004, \$15.99) can always tell when a celeb has been recently linked to colonics in a magazine article or on a television show.

“I get a whole new slew of people saying ‘weight loss?’” she said.

Sorokie says the number of procedures she’s done on patients is up 20 percent this year over last year. Sorokie’s usual crowd complains of aches, irritable bowels or gas, she says. If she actually promoted the weight management aspect, she guesses she could bump her business up another 20 percent.

“I never liked promoting it as kind of a binge and purge,” said Sorokie, who charges \$125 for a mini consultation and colonic. (Other therapists at her

shop charge \$75.)

Though it’s not a quick fix for weight loss, she says that indirectly the procedure does contribute to weight management. A stressed body will have a less efficient digestive system. When the body holds a lot of waste, there’s a tendency to hold onto water weight — up to 10 pounds.

What’s more, bad bacteria makes us crave meat and sugar, so get rid of that and you’re less likely to want unhealthy foods, colonics proponents say. Plus the cleaner the system, the better the absorption of vitamins and minerals from foods, Sorokie says. Also, after a colonic, a person is more likely to watch the way she eats.

Only Florida and California regulate the industry, which has its skeptics. Count among them Dr. Julie Roth, assistant professor of medicine at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine and a physician at the Wellness Institute at Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

The potential for weight loss is not long term, she says. After all, it’s not body fat being shed during a colonic. And, a client risks perforation of the colon during the procedure and a potential decrease in good bacteria, she adds.

To improve gut function, she recommends gradually increasing fiber intake and pushing fluids, something that might also help with long-term weight loss.

Even colonics professionals say patients shouldn’t expect miracles.

“It will help you get in that dress for one night, and may make you feel lighter that night. But when you go out and eat, the food’s going to go back into that tube,” said Hoenninger.



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SAM SYLK, WGCI radio personality who lost 20 pounds last summer with the help of three colonic treatments