

# CLINICAL roundtable

## Skin Tightening Pioneer Continues to Answer Consumer Demand

By Lara G. Owens, Contributing Editor

Thanks to continual product innovation – including updating its platform, new tip developments and improvements to its treatment guidelines – Thermage, Inc. (Hayward, Calif.) has maintained its position at the forefront of the skin tightening and body contouring markets.

With their new ThermoTip™ STC tip, the depth of radiofrequency (RF) energy delivered is optimized for the face. The cooling has been modified, compared to earlier tips, to help increase volumetric heating of the dermal tissue, resulting in more immediate tightening and better results overall. Another benefit of reduced cooling is shorter treatment time. “Most physicians who have used this new treatment tip have converted from our previous TC treatment tip because of these advantages,” explained Annette Summers, Thermage’s senior global product marketing manager.

Another recent introduction is the ThermoTip™ DC (deep contouring) treatment tip which heats 79% deeper than the STC and has shown outstanding results for patients wanting reduction and contouring on the abdomen, arms, thighs and buttocks.

The unique advantage of Thermage remains its single treatment results. Patients may see results immediately but improvement will continue for up to six months. Retrospective patient reviews are revealing that benefits may last as long as 18 months to two years.

For the treatment of cellulite the ThermoTip™ CL is the most recent addition to Thermage’s line of tips. After 22 months of study, Thermage discovered that by introducing more cooling into its deep treatment tips, better improvements could be achieved in dimpling for the thigh and buttock areas. Results have lasted more than a year without the need for repeat visits.

By working with experienced clinicians worldwide Thermage has written extensive guidelines that include moderate energy

levels and multiple passes during treatment. Thermage also proved that patient feedback on heat sensation is a valid method to determine safe and efficacious treatment levels. In a 5,700 patient study by a consensus panel consisting of key opinion leaders in aesthetic dermatology and plastic surgery, it was found that with the newer guidelines, patient satisfaction was significantly higher. In addition, the current number of adverse events has been reduced to almost zero. Since the launch of the first Thermage product, more than 450,000 Thermage procedures have been performed.

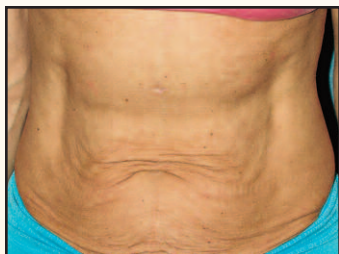
Patients may see results immediately but improvement will continue for up to six months. Retrospective patient reviews are revealing that benefits may last as long as 18 months to two years.

Introduced last year, the ThermoCool® NXT® platform, with its increased treatment speed and ergonomic design, is the updated version of the ThermoCool® system. Its improved user interface and increased treatment speed allows clinicians to perform more procedures, leading to increased profitability and improved treatment experience.

### Editor’s Note:

In the following clinical roundtable discussion, five dermatologists and one plastic surgeon share their knowledge and experience with past and present Thermage technology.

*"Thermage products permit me to lift, tighten and contour the skin in a way that nothing else currently can and with no downtime."*



Before Tx



Three months after single Body by Thermage treatment

Photos courtesy of David Magilke, M.D.

### How has the demand for non-invasive body shaping and skin tightening treatments evolved in your practice? Has demand increased recently?

**Anne Chapas, M.D.** – Now that deeper tips are available and achieving great results, more people are referring their friends and wanting more areas treated.



**Anne Chapas, M.D.**  
Dermatologist  
Laser and Skin Surgery Center  
of New York  
New York, NY

**Michael Kaminer, M.D.** – There is an increasing number of people in the right age range that can benefit from treatment and there's also more awareness. The waning economy has steered patients toward procedures less expensive than surgery.

**Richard Baxter, M.D.** – I have definitely seen an increase in demand. People are busy and don't have time to recover from surgery and they are afraid of anesthesia.

**Robert Weiss, M.D.** – I believe that with the present economy, patients are putting off major surgical procedures for less invasive, less expensive maintenance procedures like these.

**Karyn Grossman, M.D.** – I've definitely seen an increase in demand. Many are hesitant to undergo the knife but still want to look good.

### Explain the role of Thermage products in your practice.

**Dr. Baxter** – Thermage products are for patients not ready or not candidates for surgery, but that have skin laxity. Thermage treatments also help to enhance a face-lift.

**Deborah Atkin, M.D.** – Thermage products permit me to lift, tighten and contour the skin in a way that nothing else currently can and with no downtime.

**Dr. Weiss** – They are our go-to devices for skin tightening, especially when we want to treat sagging jowls or areas around the eyes.

**Dr. Chapas** – I use Thermage products to help improve crepey skin on the arms and wrinkles above the knees. I also use them to treat people who want more toned and tighter abdomens, hips or buttocks.

**Dr. Kaminer** – They are most appropriate for younger people who aren't ready for a face-lift or older people who aren't willing to handle the cost, risk and downtime of a face-lift.

### What has been your experience with Thermage's STC tip?

**Dr. Grossman** – STC is great on the face and eyes. When I treat the eyes and face patients often see that they look better when they get out of the treatment chair.

**Dr. Kaminer** – The STC tip is designed for less cooling of the skin and more superficial heating, which has made a world of difference. It's my main tip for facial applications.

*"The DC tip does a nice job on the upper arms, lower abdomen and skin around the navel."*

**Dr. Weiss** – The STC tip works well for thinner skin or more superficial wrinkles, such as around the eyes. We also get good results on the neck.

**Dr. Baxter** – We use the STC tip for faces primarily. I don't see dramatic differences in before and after photos, but if patients understand that, satisfaction is very high. Probably 80% can tell that their skin is firmer and they are happy.



**Richard Baxter, M.D.**

Board Certified Plastic Surgeon  
Plastic Surgery Clinic  
Mountlake Terrace, WA

### What has been your experience with the Thermage Deep Contour (DC) tip?

**Dr. Atkin** – In the past I couldn't get results on the body as predictable as those on the face. Now that Thermage offers the deep contour tips, the results on the body will be better.

**Dr. Baxter** – We've had the DC tip since the fall of 2007 and we find it gives a better result than the earlier tips. Occasionally we'll get as much as a two inch reduction in circumference with a single treatment.

**Dr. Chapas** – You get great heating from the upper papillary dermis down to the deeper dermis with the DC tip.

**Dr. Kaminer** – We use the DC tip on the body, but more to tighten than contour. The tip does a nice job on the upper arms, lower abdomen and skin around the navel. We're also treating more thighs (just above the knee).

**Dr. Weiss** – I've been getting nice results when I use the original medium-depth tips to tighten areas such as the abdomen. Recently I started to use the DC tip and the results have been very encouraging.

**Dr. Grossman** – We use the DC tip to firm up loose skin and the thin layer of fat on the abdomen. If a patient has only loose skin I use the STC tip.

### What is your experience with the new CL tip for cellulite?

**Dr. Weiss** – I am looking forward to using it. Theoretically it should provide excellent results.

**Dr. Grossman** – We've had the CL tip for two months. Our current patients have lost some inches and we've seen improvement in the clenched buttock.

**Dr. Atkin** – I've just begun using the CL tip. Many cellulite procedures rely on maintenance treatments with suction or massage, so I'm eager to see how long results last with the CL tip without massage.

**Dr. Kaminer** – I've been getting great results with the old tips. But now I'll probably try the CL tip.



Before Tx



Six months after single Body by Thermage treatment for cellulite

Photos courtesy of Julio Barba, M.D.

*Patients immediately see improvement more than 75% of the time. This immediate improvement also seems to predict good results down the road.*



Before Tx



Immediately after single Face by Thermage treatment

Photos courtesy of Michael Kaminer, M.D.

#### Do you have any other comments about the results you've seen with CL tips?

**Dr. Kaminer** – Patients immediately see improvement (which is not swelling or a mirage) more than 75% of the time. This immediate improvement also seems to predict good results down the road.

**Dr. Atkin** – It's more an issue of tightening the tissue, although you probably get reduction in circumference. We do know at high treatment energies, fibroseptae can shrink even that day.



**Deborah Atkin, M.D.**

Dermatologist  
Private Practice  
Del Mar, CA

**Dr. Grossman** – We've seen some nice lift in the buttocks. We don't usually measure circumferences, but we have found 2 cm to 3 cm losses in the thighs of the patients we've measured.

**Dr. Chapas** – Most people have been very satisfied. We treat until we see evidence of tightening, these patients tend to do better in the subsequent months.

#### How long must patients wait to see the final result? How long do those results last?

**Dr. Grossman** – I am actually my oldest patient. When I treated my brow the second time, five years after the first treatment, I could still see improvement over my baseline.

**Dr. Atkin** – We tell people that in two to five years they may want another treatment, not because they've lost the benefit, but because they continue to age after the treatment.

**Dr. Chapas** – No matter what area you're working on, collagen remodeling takes three to six months to fully achieve. Results generally last one to two years.

**Dr. Weiss** – Patients see results at four to six months and last several years.

#### How would you compare Thermage's current products with their earlier products?

**Dr. Kaminer** – In the old days some said that Thermage products didn't work well, but that's a thing of the past. If you carefully select the patients and educate them about what Thermage products will and will not do, you'll get nice improvement and happy patients.

**Dr. Baxter** – The STC and DC tips are real advancements and it's nice to have the option of treating eyelids. Mostly it's a matter of technique and experience.

**Dr. Chapas** – I've used Thermage products since 2002. The new NXT platform and the new tips enable faster and more comfortable treatments than before.

**Dr. Atkin** – The tips have improved greatly since 1999 when I first used them. With the old tips – for the whole face – you could get a patient to tolerate 100 to 150 pulses. With the new tips you can reach 300 to 600 pulses in the same amount of time.



*"Treatment tips continue to improve and patient response continues to improve. Patients are much more satisfied."*

**Dr. Weiss** – The treatment tips continue to improve and patient response continues to improve. Patients are much more satisfied and this is thrilling for us.

For tightening and contouring, what is the main advantage of using Thermage products over similar modalities?

**Dr. Baxter** – Thermage products have a good, long clinical history. That's probably the main advantage. And a single treatment produces a long lasting result.

**Dr. Weiss** – Thermage's products are our go-to devices for skin tightening. They reach much deeper than any competing device and results are much more dramatic and dependable. We are performing more procedures than ever.



**Robert Weiss, M.D.**

Associate Professor of Dermatology  
Johns Hopkins University School  
of Medicine  
Hunt Valley, MD

**Dr. Kaminer** – What makes Thermage products stand apart is that carefully picked and educated patients require only a single treatment

**Dr. Grossman** – It's a single treatment. That's the biggest advantage when compared to what else is out there.

**Dr. Chapas** – It's a one-time treatment. For a large abdomen, hips or buttocks you're looking at 60 to 90 minutes, but it's great for someone who can't come in for repeat treatments.

Please comment on your regimen for pre- and post treatment care, pain management and adverse effects.

**Dr. Kaminer** – Although we don't use topical anesthetics on any patients, I've offered 1 mg of Ativan from Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (Philadelphia, Pa.) and an injection of Demerol from Sanofi-Synthelabo, Inc. (Bridgewater, N.J.) to some patients.

**Dr. Baxter** – We are careful to gauge each patient's discomfort level and occasionally we provide an oral sedative. Deep sedation is risky because high fluences could cause injury.

**Dr. Grossman** – I haven't heard of patients getting burns or having nerve trauma since the new guidelines were put forward. I don't use topicals and patients seem to prefer that because if I use topicals patients can't feel the cooling. I simply tell patients to stay out of the sun and for the body, not to gain weight.

**Dr. Atkin** – If patients say they aren't bothered by the treatment I don't give them anything. If they're nervous I offer Valium from Roche Pharmaceuticals (Basel, Switzerland) or Ativan. It's really about getting the patient to relax.

**Dr. Weiss** – I haven't seen redness last more than 15 minutes. I find that the topical anesthetics do not increase patient comfort so we don't use them.



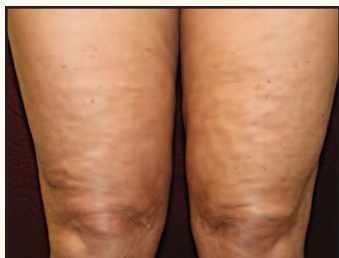
Before Tx



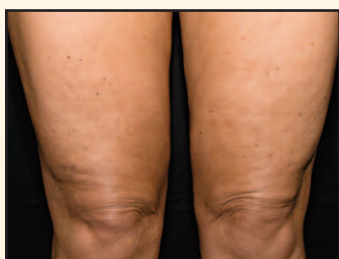
Ten months after single Eyes by Thermage treatment

Photos courtesy of Kelley Hails, M.D.

*"For body contouring, a younger patient with mild-to-moderate skin laxity and a little excess fat is the sweet spot for the DC tip."*



Before Tx



Eleven months after combined treatment of Body by Thermage and SmartLipo™ one inch above the knee

Photos courtesy of Gregory Nikolaidis, M.D.

### Who are the best candidates for Thermage treatments?

**Dr. Grossman** – For body contouring, people should be within 15 pounds of their ideal weight. For cellulite, look for people with a cellulite grade of two or three on the gynoid lipodystrophy scale. For the eyes it's hard to see a difference in someone with more than a 1 cm to 3 cm redundancy. For the brow, look for a 1 mm to 3 mm drop.

**Dr. Baxter** – For skin tightening, the less photo-aging and laxity there is, the better the patient tends to do. For body contouring, a younger patient with mild-to-moderate skin laxity and a little excess fat is the sweet spot for the DC tip.

**Dr. Atkin** – Patients in their 30s, 40s and 50s are probably the best candidates, though I do have older patients. Young non-smokers have a better chance for collagen stimulation.

**Dr. Weiss** – Patients with medium-thick skin do incredibly well with Thermage treatments. Thinner skinned patients respond well to the more superficial STC tip.

**Dr. Kaminer** – The ideal person has good skin quality, a face that's not too thin or too heavy and no unwanted changes along the jaw line, under the chin or in the upper neck. That's where Thermage products do the most impressive work.



**Michael Kaminer, M.D.**  
Cosmetic Surgeon  
SkinCare Physicians  
Chestnut Hill, MA

### What has your experience been with using Thermage products in combination with other aesthetic procedures?

**Dr. Chapas** – The only filler we do not use with Thermage products is silicone. We'll sometimes tighten body skin with Thermage, and then use the Fraxel laser from Reliant Technologies (Mountain View, Calif.), to improve texture, dyschromia or hyperpigmentation.

**Dr. Atkin** – We often combine Thermage treatment with BOTOX® from Allergan, Inc. (Irvine, Calif.).

**Dr. Weiss** – The satisfaction rate with combinations increases by several times. It has been shown that fillers plus Thermage treatments are far better for skin tightening than either treatment alone.

**Dr. Kaminer** – I'll sometimes combine a filler and Thermage on the same day so the patient can have an immediate result. By the time the filler effect has worn away, the Thermage effects will have matured into place.

**Dr. Grossman** – It's not uncommon for a patient to come in for Thermage, a filler and BOTOX on the same day. We also combine Thermage treatment with liposuction.

### A recent study tested Thermage's efficacy when combined with liposuction. Do you have experience with that?

**Dr. Baxter** – I participated in that study. We used the combination on one side of the abdomen and liposuction only on the other side. In every case there was more

*Thermage is the procedure for sagging skin. In my mind, there is no more effective non-invasive procedure for tightening sagging jowls, eyelids and skin of the neck.*

skin tightening on the side treated with the combination. We have not seen this kind of data from the laser-liposuction procedures.

**Dr. Kaminer** – You can double the amount of skin contraction when you treat with Thermage up to a month after liposuction. The data is very convincing.

**Dr. Atkin** – I think Thermage is great after liposuction, especially on the neck. If your post-liposuction skin doesn't drape perfectly, Thermage works wonderfully to help tighten and lay down the skin.

**Dr. Grossman** – I haven't done a controlled study, but for patients with skin of marginal quality for liposuction, we'll add a Thermage treatment and I've seen better results with that than I would have seen without Thermage.



**Karyn Grossman, M.D.**  
Dermatologist  
Grossman Dermatology  
Santa Monica, CA  
Manhattan, NY

**Dr. Weiss** – I've performed Thermage treatments on patients a year after liposuction and gotten very nice tightening. Others perform Thermage immediately after liposuction (while patients are still numb) and patient satisfaction increases.

#### How do you position Thermage products with your patients?

**Dr. Atkin** – I tell people that Thermage treatment resets the amount of collagen to a higher level and that they continue to age from there.

**Dr. Chapas** – I ask patients if they're at a stable weight, if they exercise regularly and if they keep a healthy diet. Thermage treatments are not for patients with large weight fluctuations, who are significantly overweight or who need abdominoplasty (such as postpartum women with rectus muscle herniation).

**Dr. Grossman** – I explain that Thermage treatments should help improve their eyes, face, body and cellulite. I explain surgery, minimally invasive procedures and non-invasive procedures and let them make up their own minds.

**Dr. Weiss** – Thermage is the procedure for sagging skin. In my mind, there is no more effective non-invasive procedure for tightening sagging jowls, eyelids and skin of the neck.

**Dr. Kaminer** – For patients who are either not ready for a face-lift or are unwilling to have a face-lift, I explain the correction Thermage treatment can give them. But if someone needs a face-lift and is willing, I send them to a plastic surgeon.

**Dr. Baxter** – I suggest Thermage treatment to patients not ready for surgery but wanting something else.

#### What treatment advice can you offer?

**Dr. Baxter** – Multiple, staggered passes allowing more overlap are more effective than following the grid. When treating a particularly sensitive area, put traction on the skin and pull it into an area that's not so sensitive and still can receive the necessary fluence.



Before Tx



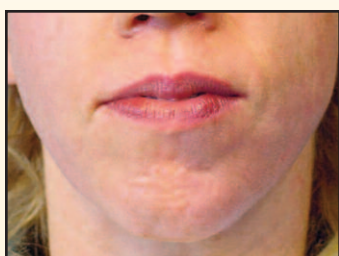
One month after single Face by Thermage treatment

Photos courtesy of Deborah Atkin, M.D.

*The future is bright for tightening and contouring procedures. The technologies are continuing to mature, so it's an exciting time.*



Before Tx



Six weeks after single Face by Thermage treatment

Photos courtesy of Robert Weiss, M.D.

**Dr. Atkin** – When I do a face I save 100 pulses. Then I tell the patient to sit upright and I give 50 pulses on each side of the face, pulling up on the area whose tightness I want to increase.

**Dr. Chapas** – Take your time, do multiple vectors and passes and you'll get the best results.

**Dr. Grossman** – You have to get a lot of pulses in. When I'm doing body contouring, I almost never use less than a 900 tip – I usually use a 1200.

**Dr. Weiss** – Keep treating until you see a visible difference. Treatment along the tightening vectors dramatically improves results.

**Dr. Kaminer** – Make sure the patient has reasonable expectations and never treat to a lot of pain. I tell patients I want to adjust the setting, so at the end of each pulse, they feel a small pinch, about a four or five on a ten point pain scale.

#### What is the future of non-invasive skin tightening and contouring?

**Dr. Weiss** – The future is more effective tightening of lax skin with improved algorithms of energy level application and fine tuning of the cooling level. We hope to achieve a non-invasive face-lift. We are getting closer and closer every year.

**Dr. Kaminer** – Thermage has done a nice job of modifying their technology and I think patients and physicians will accept it more and more.

**Dr. Atkin** – People are phenomenally interested in smoothing fat and shaping their bodies. The number of people who want a body shaping procedure will increase and so may the number of people who receive liposuction.

**Dr. Grossman** – We'll be performing more and more non-invasive procedures. People are increasingly conscious of what's available to fix their problem areas.

**Dr. Baxter** – The future is bright for tightening and contouring procedures. The technologies are continuing to mature, so it's an exciting time.