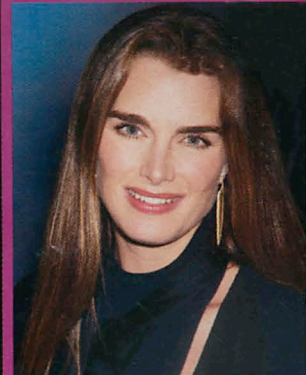


# People



## Catherine Zeta-Jones HER MOM

The pregnant *Chicago* star opens up about movies and darling age 2. 'My cocoon husband and my so important. It's to have everything



### body



Flack (at 195 lbs. in Sept. '01) calls mesotherapy "a gift from God."

## Scaling Down

Singer Roberta Flack sheds 32 lbs. with an unusual injection therapy

It had the makings of a TV talk show nightmare. On May 31, 1972, when her hit "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" was an FM radio staple, Roberta Flack appeared on *The David Frost Show*. As she recalls it, after calling Flack "talented and amazing," Frost said, "You'd be so beautiful if you lost weight. Don't you think so, audience?" The audience cheered.

Now, as then, Flack laughs off the incident. Even at 5'2" and more than 200 lbs. a year ago, she rarely fretted about the scale. "I'm comfortable. Nobody ever said, 'Oh, that song is so beautiful, but she's so fat!' If I came out today with Alicia, India—those kids—I wouldn't stand a chance."

Thus it wasn't merely vanity, but concerns about her health as she passed age 60, that drove Flack, 62, to lose more than 30 lbs. in the last 3½ months. Her method: a weight-loss program that included mesotherapy, a proce-



"I have wonderful clothes in storage to pull out," says Flack (at 163 lbs. last month).

TOP: BILL DAVILA/RETNA

Photographs by LEN IRISH



ture practiced mainly overseas that involves multiple injections into the mesoderm—the middle layer of skin—of drugs that purportedly break down fat. Under treatment by Manhattan doctor Lionel Bissoon, one of 20 mesotherapy practitioners in the U.S., Flack says, she noticed results immediately. “I saw my chins disappear,” she says. “The fat dissolved in front of my eyes. I could feel my ribs! I haven’t felt them since I was 15.”

What’s more, she says, thanks to mesotherapy shots of a vitamin A, C and E blend in her face, “my skin is smoothed out. I have a younger glow. People say, ‘You look *goood!*’”

So, is mesotherapy—developed 50 years ago in France by Dr. Michel Pistor, Bissoon’s mentor—a miracle cure or an imported scam?

“It’s completely legal and definitely not quackery,” says Dr. Jean-Marc Benchimol, vice president of the French

Association of Aesthetic Medicine, who has used the technique for 15 years. But, he adds, “for weight loss, you need a diet. The combination of mesotherapy and diet brings results.”

To date, the U.S. medical establishment isn’t convinced of mesotherapy’s efficacy—or its safety. Though widely used to administer drugs, such as anti-inflammatories in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, it has not been clinically proved as a method for fat reduction.

“I would not sign up for a cocktail of drugs to be injected into me without rigorous study,” says David B. Allison, an obesity researcher at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. “I can’t tell you it’s not safe, but would I recommend that someone I care about take it? Absolutely not. Simply saying ‘I gave it to my patients and no one complained’ is not adequate evidence.”

Bissoon, 41, a native of Trinidad

whose experience has been mainly in sports medicine, counters he has safely treated more than 300 people since 1998 and that temporary bruising is the only downside. “All the medications [we use] are FDA approved,” he says. “Once a drug is approved, you can use it for any reason you want.”

Another of his patients, model Mila Jouravleva, 28, had three treatments that she says removed fat from her stomach nine months ago. “At first I was skeptical,” she says, “but now I’d recommend it to anyone.”

Bissoon, too, emphasizes that mesotherapy, which he says liquefies fat cells so they can be eliminated by the body, isn’t enough by itself to melt those pounds away. “You also need diet and exercise,” he says.

And you need money—insurance doesn’t cover the procedure—along with a willingness to be jabbed with tiny needles as many as 500 times each 30- to 60-minute session. Flack, whose treatments cost from \$250 to \$750 each, shrugs off the pain. “I’ve done acupuncture, and needles don’t scare me,” she says. Anyway, she admits, “the needles don’t hurt as much as not being able to get into size 8.”

Flack, who lives in Manhattan, takes Bissoon’s advice about exercise and diet. “There is no such thing as a fountain of youth,” she says, but mesotherapy “inspires you to keep going.” In her case, that means five sessions a week at the gym. “I do weight training and some aerobics,” she says. “Now I’ve started with a trainer.” And she’s careful about what she eats. “I cut out wheat, dairy,” she says. “If I’m going to have something sweet, it will be all-natural fruit, on a rye cracker, with a cup of tea, no sugar, no honey.”

Already feeling great, Flack, who is currently touring the U.S. and working on a new album, is down to 163 lbs. But she isn’t finished. “I’m going to take off another 30,” she vows, “and buy something gorgeous to wear.”

● Allison Adato

● Natasha Stoyoff in New York, Cathy Nolan in Paris and Giovanna Breu in Chicago



“You can’t use this as an excuse to eat poorly and not exercise,” says Flack (toning up in a pal’s Bronxville, N.Y., yard).