

Hair Today, Gone

Wondering how to get rid of unwanted body hair? Check out our guide

Treatment: WAXING

What it is: Hot wax is applied to the skin, allowed to cool and then pulled off, removing hair at the hair follicle's base.

Pros: The procedure is relatively affordable. Typical treatments cost between \$30 and \$300 depending on the body part. Plus, "Results last three to five weeks," says Raluca Minea, a head aesthetician at New Jersey's Face Focus medical spa.

Cons: It's painful and can lead to ingrown hairs, red bumps and other skin irritation. If you have sensitive skin, this is not for you. "Also, hair needs to grow back in before you can wax again," says Cindy Barshop, owner of Completely Bare spas, which has locations in New York and Miami Beach. "So if you wax your bikini area, you can't go to the beach continuously. You have to wait out your hair growth before getting back your smooth look." Note: If you're waxing yourself, read directions carefully and test the wax first on a small area of your body so as not to burn your skin.

Treatment: ELECTROLYSIS

What it is: A small shock of electricity is sent through a needle-like probe to the base of each hair follicle in order to destroy the hair bulb and stop hair growth. Expect multiple treatment sessions.

Pros: If you have a few light hairs or very dark skin that can't be treated with laser hair removal, electrolysis can be an effective option, and may permanently halt hair growth. Electrolysis also tends to be less expensive than laser hair removal.

Cons: "It takes a lot of time to destroy each hair follicle individually. It's not cheap, and, in my opinion, it's no more permanent than laser hair removal," says Dr. Susan Evans, director of dermatology at Cosmetic Physicians of Beverly Hills. What's more, electrolysis hurts, and it can cause permanent scars.

Actress Brooke Burke proudly bares her sexy, hair-free bikini body.



Tomorrow

Treatment: LASER HAIR REMOVAL

What it is: "For this procedure, a laser is directed at a hair-bearing portion of the skin. The laser energy is converted into heat energy to destroy the stem cells of hair follicles, so the hair should not grow back," says Dr. Sandy Tsao, procedural director of the Dermatology Laser Center at Massachusetts General Hospital and director of dermatologic surgery at Harvard Medical School. Expect five to 10 sessions that last about a half an hour to an hour each.

Pros: The FDA-approved laser devices offer 90 percent hair reduction, says Dr. Tsao. It's effective for every area of the body including the bikini line, under the arms, legs, back, lips and chin. The risk of long-term irritation or scabbing is slim.

Cons: It does not come cheap. Depending on the body part, laser hair removal costs between \$100 and \$1,000 per session. It's also a bit painful, but applying a topical anesthetic or a cooling device before treatment can ease discomfort. Lastly, laser hair removal is not foolproof. "The laser targets the pigment in hair, which means the darker the hair, the more effective the laser is in providing permanent hair reduction," says Dr. Tsao. If you have either light hair or very dark skin, the laser may not target hair effectively, which could result in temporary or permanent skin discoloration. Talk with your doctor before having the procedure done because some laser devices are safer than others for dark skin. Also, be sure to go to a dermatologist's office or a medical spa where the staff is fully trained in laser hair removal. "Make sure the place has been in business for many years, that they have up-to-date machines and that laser hair removal is their forte," says Barshop at Completely Bare.



Supermodel and Victoria's Secret angel Karolina Kurkova makes a living showing off her silky smooth skin.

Treatment: SHAVING

What it is: You know the drill: You lather up moist skin and use a razor to shave off hair at the skin's surface.

Pros: It's quick, inexpensive and doesn't involve professional help.

Cons: Shaving can cause ingrown hairs and some skin irritation. Also, it is a very short-term fix for hair removal. 

Treatment: CHEMICAL HAIR REMOVAL

What it is: A topical chemical cream destroys hair at the surface of the skin.

Pros: It is inexpensive, you can apply the cream at home and it often lasts a few weeks.

Cons: "I'm not a fan of these," says Dr. Tsao. "They are difficult and messy to apply, they can be very irritating to the skin and, if you're only looking for a temporary solution, waxing or shaving gives you a cleaner result." Also, these chemical solutions are not recommended for use on the face.

ASK RACHEL

Our health director answers your top questions



DEAR RACHEL

I think my friend is battling bulimia. What are the symptoms?

A. You're a good friend to be concerned. Bulimia is a life-threatening disorder characterized by overeating and then compensating for the extra calories by purging or fasting and/or exercising, says therapist Karen R. Koenig, author of *The Rules of "Normal" Eating*. While bulimia is not always easy to recognize (being underweight is not a typical sign), it is treatable with professional help. If your friend displays even a few of the symptoms below, she may have an eating disorder and need to see a counselor.

- Secrecy around eating and after eating
- Frequent trips to the bathroom after meals or use of laxatives or diuretics
- Strange eating behaviors including avoiding eating with others, sudden dietary likes and dislikes, skipping meals and drinking a lot of diet soda or water
- Excessive or rigid exercise regimen
- Preoccupation with weight or food
- Wearing baggy clothes to hide the body
- A distorted body image
- Discolored teeth or swollen gums
- Stomach pain or intestinal problems
- Irregular periods

For more information, visit the National Eating Disorders Association at edap.org.

DEAR RACHEL

Are there products that prevent irritation after shaving or waxing?

A. Yes there are. Bikini Bump Blaster (available at completelybare.com) contains exfoliating glycolic acid and cleansing salicylic acid, which work together to prevent clogged pores, ingrown hairs and red bumps. Jurlique Honey Cream (jurlique.com) is also a good pick. It contains natural alpha hydroxyl acids that exfoliate skin and guard against ingrown hairs.



IF YOU HAVE A HEALTH OR FITNESS QUESTION, e-mail askrachel@okmagazine.com OR WRITE TO: ASK RACHEL, OK! MAGAZINE, 475 5TH AVE., NEW YORK, NY 10017

These answers are not intended to substitute for individual professional care.