

Which Hair-Removal Method (If Any) Is Best For You?

Stuck in a hairy situation? Maybe it's time to explore options beyond your razor-and-shaving-cream routine.



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Is it weird that millions of women around the world spend tons of time and money—and regularly test their pain thresholds—in the name of removing face and body hair? Who's to say? Culture is weird. Humans are weird. We are weird. But we do know that at this point, most women's decision to go hairless, neatly trimmed, or long and loose—and how to achieve the look—is based predominantly on aesthetics and cultural standards of beauty.

Once upon a time, in addition to beauty standards, there were more health-oriented reasons to remove hair, e.g., nixing breeding grounds for [parasites](#) and maintaining cleanliness. But those of us living a modern lifestyle get to make the choice based on what looks and feels good. Experts [Tsippora Shainhouse](#), a board-certified Beverly Hills dermatologist, and Enrique Ramirez, esthetician and founder of [Face to Face NYC](#), share their insights on best and worst hair-removal methods based on their clients' specific needs.

How you groom—or whether you go wild—is a personal choice. But if you do choose to keep your stubble on lockdown, we have the lowdown on the pros, cons, and best practices associated with managing when things get hairy.

The Methods and Their Madness

Hair grows in different amounts all over the human body and is “normal, natural, and genetic,” says Shainhouse. “Some ethnicities [tend to grow] more hair than others, while some women have darker hair that is more noticeable [versus] lighter, finer hair.”

In women, elevated testosterone levels can be responsible for darker, thicker hair in some places, while a [thyroid](#) imbalance can sometimes be to blame for loss of hair. Shainhouse says there are no dietary or otherwise easy fixes for tricking your body into growing less hair, so you've got to learn to either love the fuzz or exert the effort to eliminate it.

Here, we break down the eight major players in the hair-removal game by their pros and cons, exploring the associated pain, cost, convenience, and duration of results. We also touch on best practices for achieving smooth, flawless skin.

Shaving

Ah, this old standby. Shaving continues to be the default hair-removal method for most women and was often the first one they tried back in the day. Shaving maintains its popularity because it's accessible, easy, fast, and cheap. The good news? Shainhouse says shaving will not make your hair grow back thicker. That said, the results of shaving can “last hours to days, depending on the body site and how quickly your hair grows,” according to Shainhouse, meaning it's one of the shortest-lasting hair-removal methods.

If you're committed to shaving, you've got to be prepared to rinse and repeat—potentially every day, depending on how quickly your hair grows and how important it is to you to be stubble free. Another potential downfall of shaving is the likelihood of nasty razor burn, which Shainhouse says can be prevented by using an electric shaver, which is less likely to irritate the skin but doesn't guarantee a razor-close shave.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Shainhouse says it's best to scrub up with warm water before reaching for your razor and shaving cream. This will soften the hair and open the pores, making for a smoother shave. It's also a good idea to keep skin exfoliated, which will lessen the likelihood of folliculitis. This common shaving risk occurs when “follicles get irritated or infected,” according to Shainhouse, who also recommends using a razor with multiple blades for a closer shave with less chance of irritations like ingrown hairs. Once you've done the work, there's not much you can do to slow the growth of shaved hair, but you will certainly want to keep the area soothed and moisturized.

Waxing and Sugaring

Like ripping off a band-aid (only worse—maybe more like 100 band-aids), waxing is not for the faint of heart but is extremely satisfying once it's over. Waxing is super effective and is one of the longest-lasting hair-removal methods (more than a month of smoothness), according to Ramirez, whose expertise is waxing and sugaring. The cons here are the high pain factor, the cost (one treatment area can cost anywhere from \$7 at a strip mall salon to more than \$100 at a high-end spa), and the time and effort it takes to get in for an appointment with the professionals.

Like waxing's hipper, crunchier cousin, sugaring works basically the same way (pulling whole areas of hair out at once with product-infused strips of cloth), but with a solution of sugar, lemon juice, and hot water in place of wax. In Ramirez's expert opinion, “Sugaring is perfect for those who prefer the organic approach to life,” but will feel a bit more “uncomfortable to the client as we apply the paste in both directions to ensure every hair is caught in the sugar paste.”

Results will last about the same duration as waxing (four to six weeks on average) and come at a similar cost, depending on which salon you visit.

So how do you make the choice between waxing and sugaring? Ramirez says, “If the hair is soft and thin, then I suggest sugaring. For thicker hair, waxing is best.”

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

You can prep for waxing or sugaring by resisting the urge to shave beforehand, as your hair should be at least a quarter of an inch long at your appointment. You should exfoliate, however, to reduce the risk of ingrown hairs. And if you’re really concerned about the pain, you can pop an over-the-counter anti-inflammatory like ibuprofen a half hour before you go.

Depilatory Creams

The unappealing aspects of over-the-counter depilatory creams like Nair and Veet are their weird odors and the fact that you have to stand around in the bathroom naked and awkward until it’s time to rinse them off. That said, they’re cheap, fast, easy (even for hair-removal novices), and can be used in the privacy of your home whenever you have a spare moment.

Plus, depilatory creams have results that are similar to shaving—with none of the razor burn, because they chemically soften and dissolve unwanted hair so it can be rinsed away.

Shainhouse makes the point that “results should last a few days, depending on how quickly your hair grows, but in contrast to a razor blade that slices each hair shaft so that new hair growth appears thick and blunt, the tips of the cream-treated hairs will grow in softer,” which may let you go longer between treatments.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Shainhouse says depilatory creams are quite safe to use as long as you do a patch test first to make sure you don’t have an allergic or other reaction to the product. After you rinse and wipe the hair away, moisturize the area as you normally would.

Epilators

Once hailed as the at-home hair-removal “revolution” of the ‘80s, the new epilator machines are sleeker and smaller but still operate in the same (slightly scary-sounding) way that their predecessors did. An epilator machine is a small, hand-held electric device that looks a bit like a shaver but is really a system of many tiny tweezers that electronically pull out several hairs at once as you move the machine over the skin. You’re probably asking yourself *Doesn’t that hurt?* The answer is a resounding yes. So why do some people, including epilator fanatic Kelsey Miller, still stick with this method?

It lasts about as long as waxing, has the benefit of reducing hair thickness over time, and you can do it in your home without a salon appointment. Plus, you only need to buy the epilator once (usually for under \$100), which means no more shelling out for expensive waxing treatments every four to six weeks.

Threading

This seemingly magic hair-removal method needs to be performed by a trained professional since it requires the special skill of using two strands of twirled thread to “catch” the hairs and physically pull them out. Seriously, how do they do that? As with plucking, you can only grasp a few hairs at once, so threading is better for small areas like your eyebrows and lip line.

There are no products applied to the skin in this method, so there’s “no risk of contact dermatitis,” according to Shainhouse, “but you can irritate the follicles from the tugging and potentially develop a folliculitis.” You have to be prepared for the pain, which is akin to regular plucking, and the cost (usually about the same as waxing), time, and effort associated with getting yourself to a professional threader. You can get nice shaping work done this way, however, and can expect results to last several weeks.

Should you go big and go permanent?

This decision is akin to getting a tattoo: You should only consider a permanent (or permanent-ish) hair-removal method if you're sure you won't regret it. Kim Kardashian famously wrote on her website that she regretted zapping the little hairs around her neck and hairline since now she thinks they look "youthful." But if you're positive you won't want to try the pro-body-hair trend that might catch on even more in the future, you do have some options that will allow you to just be done with it. They're expensive in the moment, but compared to years of buying waxing and shaving products, you may come out on top even if you opt for a pricier treatment.

Electrolysis

Electrolysis is the only truly permanent method of hair removal, according to Shainhouse, who puts it this way: "This old-school method uses electricity to zap individual hair roots within the follicle. The goal is to destroy the root and the follicle so that no new hairs grow."

It's also one of the most expensive hair-removal methods, costing "a few dollars per minute of treatment," and usually requiring multiple treatments to get genuinely permanent results. Even then, it is possible for hormonal imbalances to cause new hairs to grow, requiring more treatments. That said, in most cases, once your electrolysis treatment course is complete, you can revel in your smooth, hairless skin into perpetuity.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Yep, as you may have guessed, electrolysis a pretty painful way to go hairless, but the discomfort of treatments can be managed with a topical cream applied before the procedure. Other risks include tiny, temporary scabs around the treated hair follicles and, worse, scarring that Shainhouse says is "either due to post-inflammatory pigmentary changes or physical scarring of the follicle and skin." Finally, since this is a clinical treatment that should take place at a medical spa, you'll want to follow aftercare instructions to a tee, otherwise you can risk bacterial infections like impetigo.

Laser

Although not a *truly* permanent hair-removal method, laser treatments are a very effective method for “permanently *reducing* hair growth by at least 50 to 70 percent after a set number of treatments,” says Shainhouse. It’s the most expensive option discussed here, and, as Ramirez stresses, must always be completed or overseen by an MD at a medical spa. You’ll also need to plan to stay out of the sun for a few days after each treatment to avoid skin hyperpigmentation. That said, after five to 10 treatments, you’ll see impressive results that people tend to be happy with. In fact, the [American Society for Dermatologic Surgery](#) reports that laser hair removal just keeps getting more and more popular.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

This isn’t so much a trick as it is a shortcoming. Although people who get laser treatments tend to be happy with the results, it’s not suited to every skin or hair color.

“The laser uses focused light that is attracted to brown or black pigment,” explains Shainhouse. “It works best on people with light skin and dark hair. Lasers cannot treat blonde, white, gray, or red hair because there isn’t enough pigment to target.” On top of that, using lasers on darker or tanned skin carries a risk of burning or removing pigmentation from the skin. Major bummer. So while there are specific lasers that are safer for darker skin types, you’ll want to discuss whether laser is a safe option for your particular skin tone.

Or, you could just not.

Not into the hassle, money, pain, or aesthetic of baby smooth, hairless skin? More and more women are rocking their body hair au naturale. Maybe you’ll be the next one to let it all out.