

A woman with long dark hair is shown in profile, shaving her face. She has a thick layer of white shaving foam on her chin and upper lip. She is holding a blue razor in her right hand and is in the process of shaving. Her eyes are closed, and she has a focused expression. The background is a dark, solid color.

FACIAL HAIR

A WOMAN'S PRIVATE DILEMMA

BY JOYCE PALMER

You are driving, stopped at a stop light, and you glance in the review mirror. The sun is shining at just the right angle and you see it...that shadow over your lip or the straggly stiff growth on the tip of your chin! Well, you are not alone. Almost 85% of normal women remove unwanted facial and body hair. However, only 5% to 10% of women have excess hair in the male distribution pattern, also known as hirsutism.

Causes of Women's Facial Hair

A woman's hair is lovely and almost magical, but it better not be on her face. When we see facial hair on a woman, we immediately attribute it to a hormonal imbalance. The truth is, only 1 out of 20 women have true hirsutism, which is moustache, beard, chest hair, stomach hair and genital hair. The rest have follicular sensitivity to the hormone testosterone. That means hormone levels are normal, but the follicles detect even the smallest amount and make more hair than wanted.

Polycystic ovarian disease, congenital adrenal hyperplasia, ovarian tumors, obesity, pregnancy and certain drugs are also causes of facial hair. There are treatments for these conditions that range from oral contraceptives to drugs such as Spironolactone and Flutamide. These drugs will not get rid of the hair already growing, but will reduce follicular sensitivity and help prevent new hair from being made. Results usually can be seen within 6 months to 12 months. But what do we do in the meantime?

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Hair Removal

Hair removal goes as far back as 4000 B.C. Women are supposed to have smooth, hairless skin. Our ancestors tried removing hair by making their own creams that contained bizarre concoctions of arsenic, quicklime and starch. Today the easiest and least expensive method is shaving, and although it will not increase growth or thickness of hair, it has to be done daily and can feel stubbly.

Waxing and threading last longer, however the hair has to be a certain length before it can be treated. Waxing and threading can cause ingrown hairs which in turn can cause acne.

Electrolysis is permanent but treats the hairs one at a time. Low level electric current heat up the follicle and kill the root that produces the hair. The downside is that electrolysis is very tedious

and needs weekly appointments which can go on for years and results are slow.

Laser hair removal is approved for permanent reduction and is the method of choice for most people today. Lasers work similar to electrolysis, but do huge areas at once and results are seen within 2 – 4 weeks. Lasers heat up the follicle and kill the root, while leaving the surrounding skin undamaged. All skin types

can be treated, but not all hair colors can. Blond or white hair will have little or no results with laser. Light skin and dark hair will have the best results. Darker skin types can be treated very successfully with the right laser and a lot of experience. Treatments with the wrong laser or incorrect settings can result in burns, blisters, discolorations and scarring.

Since facial hair is always caused by testosterone, either by higher levels or sensitive follicles, it is very unpredictable. Your face has the ability to grow 500–1000 hairs in each square centimeter, which happens to be the same as a gorilla. Stimulating all these hairs in your life time is most likely not going to happen, but it does make you understand why your treatments may go on for years as your body keeps producing them a few at a time. So make sure that the clinic you choose has the right equipment with experienced, knowledgeable and friendly staff. You may know them for a long time.

