

There is an increased demand to be free of hair over most parts of the body except for the scalp. The trend began as more of us desire to exhibit that well sculptured chest, a pair of never ending legs or wear the tiniest bikini. Tolerance over unsightly exhibition of hair is low these days. An example will be Julia Robert's hairy underarms. The consensus now is that if women want to exhibit their underarms to the public, they should be fuzz free. Media and affluence has attuned our aesthetic senses.

Women have been removing unwanted hair as far back as the days of Cleopatra. Some methods remain essentially the same, such as sugar waxing. Since then, there has been a plethora of methods for hair removal. The most common method is shaving as it is convenient. Drawbacks are irritation resulting in hyperpigmentation, razor burns and quick re-growth of hair in a few days. The ladies should try rubbing their legs for a few days after shaving – it is rough because of the stubbles. A frequent complaint after shaving is itch. As a result there are legs or forearms covered with scratch marks.

Depilatory creams are popular for large areas but can be messy. There is also the issue of irritation when plucking with a tweezer for those isolated few strands of mainly facial hair. Similarly, threading is also used for facial hair and it gives the best result if you need that perfect eye-brow. The thread is able to catch the finest hairs so as to give a clean and sharp outline to the eye-brow.

Waxing is popular as the hair-free period is about 4 weeks and the hair that re-grows is also finer. Large areas can be treated too. However, it is painful and sometimes burns occur if the wax is too hot when applied to the skin. There is a problem of ingrown hairs as well which also occurs in shaving.

All the hair removal methods mentioned so far are temporary. Thus there is need for repeated visits to the salon for waxing or threading. Coupled with endless supplies of shavers and cans of depilatory creams, this all translates to an escalating cost. There is also an issue of inconvenience especially with waxing when hair needs to be grown out before waxing can be done. Thus that pair of legs or chest has to go under cover for a week or two before removal.

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FREE

by Aesthetic Clinician Dr Komathi Rajaratnam





There is a lasting solution and that is to undergo permanent hair removal. Electrolysis is the only option that results in permanent hair removal. However, the problem with electrolysis is that it is time-consuming as a needle has to be placed in each hair follicle at a time. This is a painful and tedious process as there are hundreds of hair follicles over a small area of skin. Moreover, burns occur if the electrode is not positioned correctly, which could lead to scarring, keloid formation, hyperpigmentation or hypopigmentation.

Permanent reduction of hair can be achieved through the use of lasers and IPL (Intense Pulse Light). Lasers and IPL both use light energy to destroy hair follicles by using specific wavelengths that target the melanin that is present in the hair follicle. The hair has to

be in the growth (Anagen) phase for the hair follicle to be effectively destroyed. If the hair is in the rest (Telogen) phase the treatment is ineffective.

Since the hair follicles are in different stages of development, several sessions are required before adequate reduction of hair is obtained. The permanence of the result depends on the extent of destruction of the hair follicle which is governed by various factors, such as the thickness and colour of the hair and skin and any presence of hormonal dysfunction with regards to the patient, and the





Photography by Nara Vieira da Silva Osga

specificity of the emitted wavelength, energy output and the experience of the hair treatment specialist with regards to the machine's operation. There has been an issue over the use of the term permanent hair removal. Clinical studies have shown that permanence does occur with lasers such as the diode and Nd-Yag. IPL is able to retard regrowth and that period of retardation can be as short as a few months depending on the IPL machine used.

Both laser and IPL can cause burns. Lasers can only be operated by a licensed doctor. Thus, visit a doctor you can trust and be on the way to becoming fuzz free soon! •

