



HAIR REMOVAL

<http://www.aocd.org>

Only the palms, soles and lips lack hair follicles, this means the rest of our skin surface can potentially grow hair. Unwanted hair growth can be a significant problem for some individuals. There are several different approaches to hair removal but to treat unwanted hair growth it is important to understand a little bit about normal hair growth.

Generally speaking the hair on the body goes through cycles of active hair growth and periods of rest when no significant growth occurs. The active growth phase is termed anagen. This is followed by a brief transition phase known as catagen in which the hair changes from active growth to a non-growing period known as the telogen phase. These phases are not the same on all areas of the body. For example the telogen, or resting phase tends to be longer in the eyebrows, eyelashes and axillary hair while telogen tends to be relatively short in the scalp and beard areas. This information is important because in order to have permanent hair removal the hair needs to be treated in the anagen or active growth phase.

Permanent hair removal/reduction can be done by electrolysis or by the use of **lasers**. Both systems involve trying to destroy the hair bulb or root of the hair during the active growing phase. This is done by heating the hair follicle/bulb sufficiently enough to result in destruction of the growing cells. Since not all hair grows in the same cycle at the same time and since only treatments to actively growing hair can create permanent reduction in hair counts, patients require multiple treatments separated by weeks to increase the likelihood of success. The number of treatments needed varies based on several variables including hair color, hair density, age and hormones. In electrolysis a technician inserts a fine electrical wire (similar to the diameter of a hair) into the actual hair follicle opening and uses electricity to heat and destroy the growing hair bulb. This can be somewhat painful and tedious. A laser uses electrical energy in the form of light waves to heat up the hair bulb without damaging the surrounding skin. This can be done to more than a single hair at a time so the process is quicker than electrolysis. The laser requires having a pigmented "target" on which the laser light energy can focus to maximize its effect. This means light colored hair generally does not respond well to laser treatments.

Other forms of hair removal have been around just about as long as mankind and include shaving, plucking, and waxing. One can also use chemical depilatories that dissolve the hair. A newer treatment is the use of a cream (eflornithine) that actually slows the growth of hair but does not remove it, so it must be used with ones regular hair treatments until it can take effect.

This information has been provided to you compliments of the American Osteopathic College of Dermatology and your physician.

The medical information provided in this article is for educational purposes only and is the property of the American Osteopathic College of Dermatology. It is not intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice and shall not create a physician - patient relationship. If you have a specific question or concern about a skin lesion or disease, please consult a dermatologist. Any use, re-creation, dissemination, forwarding or copying of this information is strictly prohibited unless expressed written permission is given by the American Osteopathic College of Dermatology. For detailed information including links to related topics on this and many other skin conditions with photos, visit: <https://www.aocd.org/page/DiseaseDatabaseHome>