



Shaving Down Below

We have managed to put golf carts on Mars and we are engineering cows with genes that nature never intended, but we have yet to find a particularly good way to remove unwanted body hair. In this chapter, we look at temporary methods for removing unwanted body hair, then at permanent methods.

IMPORTANT: Both of our gynecology consultants have encouraged our women readers who shave to use a bikini trimmer instead. They are not opposed to getting rid of pubic hair, but they are concerned about the extensive amounts of vulvar skin irritation they see due to shaving.

Body Hair Removal

"I'm more aware of myself and my sexuality when I'm shaved. It feels sensual, like the first time you wear silk underwear. It's too much trouble to keep up, though. If there was an easy way, I think I'd do it more often." *female age 36*

"Shaving is painful and I look about 12 years old, it grosses me out. Trimming works! Borrow a beard trimmer and go for it! One crew cut coming up!" *female age 29*

"My husband really likes to trim my pubic area for me. He gets turned on by this. I think it's highly arousing, too." *female age 45*

Women have shaved or plucked their body hair for thousands of years. However, here in the U.S., the current trend of shaving the female frame got its start in the year 1915, when the Wilkinson Sword Razor company began an ad campaign to convince women their arm-pit hair was unfeminine and unclean. This coincided nicely with the introduction of the first sleeveless evening gowns. Razor sales started to soar.

Now, a hundred years later, even men are getting into below-the-neck pruning, although not to the extent of women. It used to be a man who did this was considered effeminate. Now he's liable to be a member of the football team.

As for sex differences between men's and women's bodies, a hair follicle is pretty much a hair follicle, there aren't boy ones and girl ones. Some follicles might be more androgen-sensitive and grow a thicker hair, but the underlying mechanism is the same. What is different among the sexes is the timing and predictability of hair growth.

By the time a male is 25, he's got a pretty good idea of how much body hair he is going to have, and where. Not so for women. Nature has reserved the right to play wicked hair tricks on a woman's body at any point during her lifespan. A female reader sums it up quite aptly:

"I used to have this lovely, neat, wonderfully behaved triangle of pubic hair. And then I turned thirty, and the thing started to spread..." *female age 32*

Men's Pubic Hair Removal – Maintenance Vs. Scorched Earth

When we first started asking our sex survey takers whether men remove their pubic hair, we expected to see a 10% to 20% "yes" rate. We didn't anticipate being blown away with 50% and more. Nor did we expect to see nearly total agreement between the men's numbers and the women's assessment of whether their male partners removed their pubic hair. (Men and women can't agree on how much sex they've had with each other, but when it comes to crotch trimming, detente abounds.)

But then we got smarter, and asked for specifics about male pubic hair removal. While a lot of guys trim their pubic hair, most only do it once a month and very few men shave their pubic hair. So there's not even close to equality between men and women when it comes to pubic hair grooming habits.

When men did shave their pubic area, it was usually the scrotum. They report their wives and girlfriends prefer a kinder and gentler scrotum for giving oral sex to. And that's exactly what we heard from female survey takers: they went on and on about how annoying it is to get a pubic hair stuck in the back of their throat. Many of them commented on how much nicer it is to lick and suck on a well-trimmed



or shaved scrotum, but they thought it a bit weird if a guy shaved off all of his pubic hair, saying it was like sleeping with a Cub Scout. The women appreciated maintenance as opposed to scorched earth, and they rewarded it by giving more oral sex.

Men with hairy backs and shoulders are likely to shave, wax or laser that part of their body, but we haven't done any surveys on that.

Not Everyone Wants Their Partner Bare

Some people prefer their partners with pubic hair, or at least some of it. One guy says he thinks it's sexy when a woman has more than a tiny landing strip, and a woman tells us she's fed up with her boyfriend's bare scrotum that feels like the fruit on a cactus. So before you go to the pain of waxing or plucking your privates, why not ask your partner what he or she thinks?

The Big Myth about Shaving

Contrary to what you often hear, there is no truth to the myth that shaving results in a thicker hair follicle or increased hair growth. The reason hair might look thicker after you shave or trim it is because you are cutting the hair off at the thickest part, around the base. A normal, full length hair is thickest at the base and tapers toward the tip. So instead of a soft, well-worn tip like that on a fully grown hair, a newly shaven hair will look like a tree stump and have a nasty, sharp edge. En masse, newly shaven hairs create the 5 o'clock shadow.

Shaving is by far the safest method of temporary hair removal because it does no damage to the follicle. There are two different kinds of razors to consider, depending on whether you are shaving a large flat area, like your legs, back or chest, or something more rounded, like your face or pubic area.

For chest, back and leg hair, try a woman's razor for leg hair. It doesn't matter if you are male or female, women's razors are often made for large, flat areas. If you are shaving your crotch, you'll want a razor with a head that swivels, like many of the razors that are for men's faces. A razor designed to navigate the chin will make small-time of the scrotum. Experiment and find what is best for your hair and skin type. No matter what parts you are shaving, it may take weeks before your hair and skin settle into an obliging routine.

If you are shaving between your legs, it is often easier to do it in the shower or bath. Or, you can warm the area for several minutes with a wash cloth. Getting it warm and wet can help make shaving easier. You might try using shaving cream that's for sensitive skin or the "bikini area," although there's little difference between shaving cream that's marketed to women as opposed to men except for the fragrance. Keep extra cream in the hand that's not holding the razor so you can reapply it each time you are going over an area that you've already done. You don't want to pull a razor across skin that doesn't have shaving cream on it.

For the first month, you might try shaving in the direction the hair seems to grow in and not against it, although this can be a challenge in the pubic area because the hair often grows in swirls. Be satisfied with an okay job instead of a great job. An okay job means shaving with one stroke or two, and not against the grain.

If you've been at it for a couple of weeks and want to experiment with going against the grain, give it a try. But wait until you get a good sense of the different directions that the hair can grow in, and the price your skin might pay for a perfect shave. Doing an obsessively neat job often results in shaving off some of the skin, especially the little bumps in the skin that frequently populate the labia and scrotum. These are called Fordyce spots.

The skin on your genitals is not as resilient to shaving as the skin on other parts of your body. For that reason, the latest and greatest five-blade razor that works great on your face or legs might behave more like a meat-slicer on your labia or scrotum. It may also be necessary to pull the skin in your pubic area tight in order to get a good shave. Throw a pair of gonads under the surface, and good luck. Assume there will be a learning curve.

A lot of people experience itchiness and discomfort for the first month of shaving. If you have concerns, a dermatologist or a licensed hair-removal professional is a good person to consult. And if you are using an electric shaver, beware of those with rotary heads. They may not be the best choice for pubic hair.

The "pimples" that can form after shaving or plucking aren't pimples at all and should never be popped. (They can take up to five days to form after waxing.) These are often caused by pockets of pus resulting from bacteria that have gotten into the follicle, but they do not have the structure of a pimple. If you are concerned about them, check with your healthcare provider. Antibiotics might be necessary.

To help prevent ingrown hairs (*pseudofolliculitis barbae*), a number of shaving experts suggest that you exfoliate often. Try using a loofah or skin-scrubbing product, or a liquid exfoliant like Tend Skin. Some people say to do it right before you shave, and others say to do it right after. If ingrown hairs remain a problem, try using an electric razor and shave only every other day. Also check with a dermatologist to come up with the best strategy for your skin type. For one of the best discussions you will ever find about ingrown hairs, click on the "razor bumps" section at www.hairtell.com.

Loofah Note: There is some concern that natural loofahs can harbor bacteria. Some people suggest using synthetic loofah-like materials instead. There's no science to guide us either way, although a recent

study found that even the cleanest of kitchen sponges contain some of the gnarliest bacteria you can imagine, and this might suggest all is not well in Loofa Land. Perhaps using a freshly laundered washcloth is the smartest way to go.

Assorted Hair Facts—From Nipple Hair to Hair on Your Genitals

Number of Hair Follicles: All of the hair follicles anyone will ever have are formed while we are in the womb. The average newborn (and adult) has 2 million hair follicles and sweat glands. Hair follicle density is similar in women and men.

Nipple Hair: It is very common for women to have nipple hair. The hairs around the nipples tend to grow out in pairs and crisscross over each other due to the placement of follicles.

Hormonal Birth Control: Hormonal birth control can impact the growth of body hair. For some women, it can result in less body hair, and for others it can cause more. Pregnancy can cause a hormonally-related increase in body hair. Things usually go back to normal in six to twelve months after delivery.

Inner Lips: The inner labia of some women end up sticking to the sides of their legs when all of their pubic hair is removed. When this is the case, it might be better to use corn starch for a possible remedy as opposed to talc, since partners can't taste corn starch when performing oral sex and talc use in the genitals may cause an increase in cancer. (Check with a gynecologist before putting any kind of powder on your genitals.)

Hair on the Shaft of the Penis: It is not unusual for males to have hair that grows up the shaft of the penis. This might best be taken care of with electrolysis, but few guys will do that. So if you shave your shaft, shave carefully.

Will It Grow in More Thickly?

Shaving hair does not cause it to grow in more thickly. What causes hair to grow more thickly is an increase in hormones related to puberty, pregnancy, menopause and certain metabolic disorders such as PCOS. Medications such as certain inhalers, corticosteroids, some antidepressants, and some hormonal methods of birth control can cause an increase in hair growth, as can an increase in blood circulation.

Other Ways to Get Hair Off

Depilatory: This is a form of chemical warfare that dissolves the hair at the surface of the skin. You've probably heard of Nair. Depilatories don't do a better job than shaving, but some people like them. Others find they irritate the skin. Be sure to follow the instructions and check to see if they are safe to be used on the genitals. Never use a depilatory on the scrotum. (There are some very funny parody reviews for products on Amazon from men who have supposedly used a depilatory on their scrotum.)

Vaniqa: This is a prescription cream that started life as an anti-cancer drug. The reason it sometimes works on reducing hair growth is because tumor cells and hair follicles have much in common. Vaniqa also helps cure African Sleeping Sickness. So people coming out of near-death comas from sleeping sickness who were treated with Vaniqa might find their unwanted body hair gone as well. Vaniqa only removes body hair on 58% of the women who use it, and only temporarily. What's truly bizarre is that in clinical tests for Vaniqa, more than a third of the women using a placebo cream also had "improved" or "markedly improved" results with their unwanted body hair. Vaniqa hasn't been tested on men, and its safety and effectiveness hasn't been tested when it is applied to pubic hair. Plus, you need to get a prescription and it is expensive.

Tweezing: Contrary to what you might think, tweezing can do nasty damage to the hair follicle. This can be a cosmetic bummer if you radically tweeze your eyebrows and find you are stuck with the bald eyebrow look for life. The most common body parts that get tweezed are eyebrows and nipples. Warm the area with a wash cloth to trick the follicles into relaxing their grip on the hairs. To prevent over-plucking of eyebrows, www.hairfacts.com recommends you draw the line you would like with a concealer first, then pluck the little villains that reside on the other side.

Waxing and Sugaring: If you are waxing for the first time, be sure to have it done professionally or by a friend who is highly experienced. Infections and broken hairs can result. If you are a woman, the pubic area seems to be more tender when you are having a period, so wait until later for waxing. If you are a man, be aware there are scrotum-horror

stories about the wax pulling off more than pubic hair. If you are going to wax a scrotum, get special wax that is meant for that, and only work in small areas at a time. For either sex, there is no evidence that waxing decreases hair growth unless it creates scar tissue over the follicles. While some people can go for a month or two between waxings, others have visible hair growth after only a week. Wait at least two hours after showering before waxing, and try not to get sweaty for 24-hours after waxing. Facial hair needs to be at least one-eighth of an inch before waxing, while pubic hair needs to be at least one-quarter of an inch. The pain of waxing is often worse the first few times; the pain receptors in the skin don't seem to revolt nearly as much by the third or fourth time if you wax on a consistent basis.

Rotary Epilators: These are electronic torture devices with rows of tweezers that yank hairs out by the root. Some people swear by them, others swear at them. The Braun model comes highly recommended, as does the Cleancut Personal Shaver (formerly called the Seiko Cleancut). People who use the Cleancut recommend getting the companion trimmer. You need to pull the skin tight when using an epilator on your genitals and the hair has to be long enough for the mechanical tweezers to yank them, but not too long. The most pain occurs the first time you use a rotary epilator. Some of the epilators have a special attachment for the first time which reduces the number of hairs pulled out during each pass.

Threading: This is plucking with a thread. It's a traditional form of removing hair from the faces of Indian and Muslim women.

Beware of Bleaching: This isn't a way of removing hair, but trying to make it look less obvious. Bleaching can make hair look thicker because the bleach gets absorbed inside the shaft and puffs it up. Plus, it can make the hair stick out more from the skin.

Head Trips? If you are a fan of the naked noggin, you'll find all kinds of head-shaving tips at www.baldrus.com.

Permanent Hair Removal—Electrolysis

With electrolysis, a technician sticks a thin electrified needle into the hair follicle. He or she then zaps it electrically. Think of it as being like sending your hair follicles to the electric chair.

There are three different kinds of electrolysis: galvanic, thermolysis or Flash, and blended. The blend method is a combination of thermolysis and galvanic. It is said to be the best method for removing pubic hair.

An average male might have 25,000 or more hair follicles running from his navel to behind his scrotum. A woman will hopefully have fewer hair follicles, and no scrotum. One of the reasons why it is difficult to estimate how many hours of electrolysis it will take to clear your crotch is the density of hair follicles. Jacob might have only 20 active hair follicles in an area that's the size of a quarter, while his girlfriend might have 200.

When trying to conceptualize hair follicles, think of a cave with a sleeping bear inside. That's because a large number of hair follicles on our bodies are resting at any time. One of the keys to successful electrolysis is being able to start with a full initial clearance. Then follow up with several electrolysis sessions over a course of twelve to eighteen months to zap new hairs that have come out of hibernation since your last appointment.

A knowledgeable electrolysis expert offers the following perspective:

"In the pubic area, there are well over 20,000 hairs packed into that small area, so one would need to remove at least 2,000 hairs just to effect a 10% removal. Proper treatment requires longer and more frequent appointments in the beginning, and tapers off to minutes every 3 to 6 months at the end. If the aggressive schedule is not followed, one could go once a month for an hour for the rest of one's life and only get a minor reduction."

This means that you and an experienced electrolysis expert need to make a treatment plan and follow it. You'll want to be sure to get total clearance during the initial phase, which will require more and longer sessions at the start. Don't just go in for an hour or two and think it's going to work. Figure on at least ten or twelve hours to tame the wild beaver.

As for the pain, it can vary from almost none to excruciating, depending on the person who is doing the electrolysis, the person who is having the electrolysis done, and the particular part of your body that's being zapped. For instance, logic might tell you it's far more

painful to have your scrotum done than the hair at the base of your penis, but the opposite is usually true. You will definitely want to talk to the technician about pain-relief options.

With all of the special handling that goes on during hair removal of the male genitals, it's not unusual for guys to get an erection. Most attendants know about this and the erection actually helps the process because it stretches the skin more tightly. Even if you don't have an erection, you will find the electrologist will probably ask you to stretch the skin with your fingers to help the process go faster. The problem for guys who want electrolysis on their penis or scrotum is that most electrolysisists are women, and not many will work on a guy's crotch.

To find a competent electrolysisist who will do crotch hair—especially on a male—here are two possible options: visit the forums at www.HairTell.com, although you'll want to ask for references and be sure the person is licensed and legitimate. (There's never any harm in checking with the state licensing board and the Better Business Bureau to see if there are any complaints on the person.) Also, you might search online for suggestions posted on the subject by M2F transsexuals. They need a lot of electrolysis before they can have bottom surgery, and they usually know who will do it and who is good.

Between Waxing and Electrolysis—Laser Hair Removal

Laser hair removal works best if you have very light skin with dark hair growing out of it. That's because lasers work by targeting the melanin in the hair follicle. This is the compound that gives hair its color. The laser emits a very narrow bandwidth of light that can be absorbed by the melanin in the follicle. The heat that gathers in the melanin then radiates to the rest of the follicle and hopefully fries it. If your skin is olive or dark, or the hair is blond or gray, or the laser isn't well-matched for your skin type or isn't working correctly, the destructive energy can be absorbed by your skin instead of the hair follicle and nasty things can happen. (Forget using lasers for removing nipple hair. You'll end up with a nipple fry, as the dark skin will absorb all of the energy.)

Also keep in mind that there are different kinds of lasers with dozens of different brand names. Only an experienced and highly competent laser hair removal specialist will be able to advise you on what is best for your particular shade of skin and color and type of body hair.

This is why you should always have a test patch done first and not schedule any appointments for at least a week or more to make sure your skin doesn't become pigmented. Then be sure the same attendant does all of your treatments using the same machine. The people at HairTell.com have a laser hair removal consultation form you can print out. Take it with you if you are visiting a laser hair-removal center. Please read their suggestions on how to select an electrologist and what to ask.

Also, be aware that no fertility studies have been done to demonstrate the safety of using lasers on a guy's scrotum. (The lack of smooth skin on the scrotum can create its own problems with laser hair removal.) No studies have been done on whether laser hair removal impacts the sensitivity of the clitoris.

As for the home hair removal kits, there is not enough science-based information yet to say much about them. Be sure to read the consumer reviews—which tend to be mixed and you never know how many were written by PR people from the manufacturers. Calculate the added costs of replacement cartridges, and don't expect the home units to do as good of a job on pubic hair as professional equipment that costs thousands of dollars. Also, do not expect these to work if you have dark skin or light hair.

Permanent Hair Removal Precaution

This chapter has barely touched the surface of permanent hair removal. If you are considering it, please spend a few hours doing research.

Permanent hair removal can be safe, effective, and satisfying, or it can permanently damage your skin. It can also be painful, and it is almost always time-consuming and very costly. Make the experience work for you by knowing as much as you can before you take off your shirt or drop your pants and plunk down your hard-earned money.

Hormonal Problems that Cause Plentiful Hair Growth

Some hormonal conditions can cause women to have hair so thick on their faces that they need to shave twice a day. Some of these women live in dire fear that they will get into an accident and have to be hospitalized and won't be able to shave their faces. At the same time, there are men who find hairy women to be a sexual turn on.

According to Sarah Rosenthal, author of *Women and Unwanted Hair*, the causes of excessive hair growth in women can include too much androgen secretion (polycystic ovarian syndrome), overactive adrenal glands (such as

with Cushing's disease), hair follicles that are too sensitive to androgens, certain drugs (including some oral contraceptives, steroids, and dilantin), insulin resistance, hyperthyroidism, endocrine disorders, genetics, obesity and stress.

If you are bothered by the amount of hair you have or if you suddenly start growing gobs of new hair, try to find an endocrinologist who specializes in hirsutism. Just because the physician is an endocrinologist doesn't mean he or she is either sympathetic or knowledgeable about hormone imbalances and excessive hair growth.

A Big Thanks to Andrea James for an eye-opening education about getting rid of body hair.