

# A Hair Out of Place

From laser and lotion to wax and electrolysis, no hair removal routes are created equal

By Joyce Wiswell

While there are many more serious issues that challenge us, dealing with unwanted hair can be vexing. Hair sprouting up in all sorts of unwelcome places often increases as we age. Blame genetics, hormones, a medication side effect – or all of the above.



Peruse any drug store and you'll see dozens and dozens of options for hair removal other than the tried-and-true razor: bleaches, waxing kits, creams and lotions known as depilatories. They work by breaking down the hair's protein structure so that it comes out easily when the cream is rubbed off. Because they go a bit below the skin's surface, results can last longer than shaving. But many opt for a longer-lasting solution.

## ELECTROLYSIS AND LASER

The only hair removal method recognized as permanent by the Food and Drug Administration, electrolysis dates back to 1875. A very fine probe or needle is inserted into the hair follicle, destroying the hair with chemical or heat energy. The hair is then removed with tweezers.

Each treatment takes between 15-20 minutes, but because hair grows in three different stages, it can take multiple sessions to get all the hair.

"The whole thing takes two years – that's being honest," says Sherry Dewilde, an Oakland County-based independent hair removal specialist. "People want to sell something and say it only takes one treatment, but that's not true. There is no magic bullet."

With laser, highly concentrated light is beamed into hair follicles. The pigment in the follicles absorbs the light, which destroys the hair. While electrolysis tackles one hair at a time, laser is much faster, covering an area about the size of a quarter every second. But it only targets actively growing hair, therefore repeated sessions are necessary. Most people have permanent hair loss after three

to five sessions, especially with the newer laser machines on the market.

"Both laser and electrolysis are very effective, but laser can only get dark and preferably thick hairs. With thinner, lighter hair, it's a gamble. And laser does not get white hairs," Dewilde says. "Electrolysis gets any color, any size."

Both procedures "can hurt a lot," she admits.

"You're destroying hair; it's burning up," Dewilde says. "For most areas, it's tolerable. But we can use numbing cream for areas like the lip. Duet is the first laser I've known that is less painful."

Prices can vary widely; upper-lip laser can cost as little as \$20 per session, while electrolysis is about \$30 per 15-minute treatment.

"The market is saturated so everyone is trying to compete," says Dewilde, who warns against the ubiquitous bargain packages and Groupon deals. "They zip you in and out, and they are going to miss a lot of hairs, so you'll pay for it in the long run by needing more treatment."

## WAXING

In waxing, warm wax is spread over the hair. A cloth is then rubbed atop the area and ripped off in the opposite direction, removing the hair at the root. Small sections are done at a time and yes, it can really smart.

"Shaving can split the hair follicle, but waxing removes the entire follicle so you prevent ingrown hairs," says Mona Hassan, owner of Salon 360 in Dearborn.

While at-home waxing kits are available, Hassan says they are not always effective.

"The wax doesn't get hot enough, or if you stick it in the microwave,

it can get too hot. Your skin has to be protected. And you don't pull it off. You don't pull it off."

The big advantage is that it's much more permanent. The cost is as little as \$10, longer than shaving.

## THREADING

The ancient technique started in India some 6,000 years ago. Unwanted hair has been removed for generations. The technique involves an ensnaring hair and pulling it out. The technique allows for several hairs to be removed at once. Prices for threading are around \$10.

Threading is a technique passed down through generations.

"I learned it from my grandmother, Khan, a native of Miracle Browz and Roseville. Threading, and about it. It hurts like waxing."

Once you try it, you'll be hooked.

"It lifts your hair as if you had sugar. The fuzzy hairs on the brow more never go back to the way they were."

However, you should avoid those pesky hair removal products. Underlying medical conditions can cause abnormal hair growth. If you're suddenly experiencing hair growth where you never had it, see your doctor to rule out any problems or conditions.