

Here's How Long Your Laser Hair Removal Will Actually Last

We asked the experts.

[Carly Ledbetter](#)

[Laser hair removal](#) can be a costly but effective way to get rid of the unwanted hair people are sick of shaving, trimming or waxing.

But spending thousands of dollars on the required treatments doesn't always guarantee body hair will be gone for life. Below, plastic surgeons and dermatologists detail how laser hair removal works, how much it costs and just how long it lasts.



How does laser hair removal work?

“The laser light is directed at and gets absorbed by the pigment in the hair itself, which sits in the hair follicle,” said Dr. Robyn Gmyrek, dermatologist at [Union Square Laser Dermatology](#) in New York City. “When the laser light gets absorbed, it creates heat. If enough heat is generated down the hair follicle, it will destroy the hair growth center in the follicle. If the hair growth center is destroyed, you should not create a new hair.”

Gmyrek explained that body hair goes through a resting and growth cycle, which is why a series of follow-up treatments are scheduled every 4-6 weeks.

“When the hair is in a resting portion of the cycle, it may not be able to absorb enough laser light or generate enough heat to destroy the hair growth center,” she said. “This means is that you have to laser multiple times -- usually about 6 sessions – to remove a substantial portion of the hair from an area.”

Treatment can be costly.

Treatment costs, methods and effectiveness depends on each person’s skin type, hair thickness and the area being lasered off.

“No matter what area you are treating, usually about 6 treatments are needed to achieve approximately 80 percent clearance. This is based on the cycling of the hair,” Gmyrek said.

“Small areas like an upper lip range from \$150 to \$250 per session, while bikini, Brazilian bikini and the larger areas like full legs and backs can cost \$500, \$700, \$1,200 per treatment, respectively,” she said. “Keep in mind that treatment for an upper lip is just a few pulses and takes only minutes, whereas full leg treatment might be one hour of treating and over 1,500 pulses of laser.”

It doesn’t work for everyone.

The three doctors we consulted agreed the ideal candidate for laser hair removal is a very fair person with dark, coarse hair. People with red, blond,

strawberry blond, white or very fine hair have a much harder time seeing results.

“This is because there is not enough pigment to absorb the laser light in the hair. If not enough laser light is absorbed, then the heat generated is too little to destroy the follicle and treatment will be unsuccessful,” Gmyrek explained. For people who aren’t good candidates for laser, she suggested exploring electrolysis.

“Medical electrolysis devices destroy hair growth with a shortwave radio frequency after a thin probe is placed in the hair follicle,” she said.

“Electrolysis is considered a permanent hair removal method, since it destroys the hair follicle. It requires a series of appointments over a period of time.”

People with darker skin can respond well to laser hair removal.

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According to [Dr. Hooman Khorasani](#), chief of dermatologic and cosmetic surgery at Icahn School of Medicine at [Mount Sinai Hospital](#) in New York City, it’s possible to treat individuals with darker skin by reducing the amount of energy used and using longer wavelengths of light. However, he said people with darker skin have a higher chance of getting hyperpigmentation, or a darkening of the skin, as a side effect of the treatments.

Gmyrek agreed that people with darker skin can have excellent results with laser hair removal, but she also recommended getting a test spot treated first.

“There is a specific laser called an Nd:Yag which is safer to use in darker skin types,” she said. “Patients with darker skin types should proceed with caution, go to physicians with experience in treating darker skin types, and get test spots done with the laser prior to treating a larger area as they are at

increased risk for possible discoloration of the skin from laser treatment.”

Laser hair removal it isn't always permanent.

“It is unlikely to permanently remove every single hair follicle because hair growth occurs in multiple phases and can be influenced by hormones or medications,” Dr. [Wright Jones](#), plastic surgeon and founder of [Muse Plastic Surgery](#) in Atlanta, told HuffPost. “Multiple treatments may lead to long term hair reduction but patients should not expect permanent hair removal.”

Khorasani said laser hair removal is usually effective in removing 80 to 90 percent of hair.

“There will be always a little bit of hair that may come back,” he said.

Finding the right provider is the key to success.

The most important factor in laser hair removal is finding the right doctor for you, with the right qualifications. Otherwise, you're throwing money at multiple treatments that might not work *and* could end up harming you in the end.

“It is paramount that patients find an experienced provider who understands how to tailor each treatment to a specific skin type and hair color,” Wright said.

“Laser hair removal can be dangerous in inexperienced hands,” Gmyrek said. “I would highly recommend having your treatment performed by a board-certified dermatologist who is trained and skilled in using lasers and has in-depth knowledge of the skin.”

Khorasani said that with a laser in the wrong hands, patients can sometimes experience blisters, scars, hyperpigmentation or hypopigmentation. Make sure to research your provider before you go!