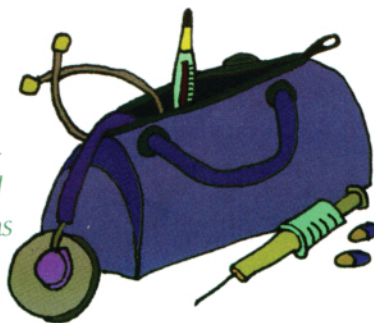




My eighteen-year-old daughter has excessive facial hair, for which she has been treated with electrolysis. Lately, I have been hearing about laser treatment, which I understand is less painful and longer-lasting. Is laser the way to go, and if so, why? Is any other treatment available?



Responding is Kevin Jovanovic, MD, FACOG, AACS, an associate professor of ob-gyn at Lenox Hill Hospital, in Manhattan. Jovanovic attended the Albert Einstein College of Medicine as well as the Yale University School of Medicine. He is a fellow of the American College of Ob-Gyn, an associate fellow of the College of Surgeons, and an associate of the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery. In his Manhattan Laser Center for Vein Treatment, he provides a full array of women's medical and cosmetic services.

Most women's hair growth reflects a combination of genetics and ethnicity. Arm and leg hair is particularly susceptible to these influences.

It is estimated that up to 10 percent of women suffer from hirsutism, or excessive midline hair growth (on the face, chest, and/or back), sometimes stemming from excess androgens (male hormones). High androgen levels can be caused by a variety of conditions, such as polycystic ovary syndrome, Cushing's syndrome, and Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia, as well as tumors and medications. If androgen levels are normal, hair growth is likely related to genetics or ethnicity (Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and South Asian) rather than a medical condition.

The routine diagnostic procedure involves a physical exam and blood tests. If any abnormalities are found, an ultrasound and a CT scan may be used to determine the exact condition.

Medical hair-removal treatments include hormone pills, anti-androgen pills, or topical creams. Effectiveness varies, and medications may take up to six months to start working.

The non-medical alternatives are mainly electrolysis and laser treatment.

In electrolysis, a needle emits an electrical pulse into a hair follicle, destroying the hair. This procedure can be painful and cause skin color changes or scarring.

Laser hair removal uses targeted light to destroy follicles permanently. Some women experience long intervals without hair growth; others need touch-up sessions. Laser treatment can cause redness, burns, or color changes, so make sure you turn to an experienced medical center.

There are also self-care methods, such as bleaching, waxing, shaving, and plucking, all of which require maintenance.

At any one time, only 20 percent of one's hair is growing, and treatments can target only growing hair, so several sessions are usually necessary. We typically schedule three to four treatments a month apart from each other. That usually results in noticeably less hair growth (such that one goes from shaving every day to shaving maybe every two weeks).

Hormones, stress, and age all affect hair growth, so "permanent hair removal" is almost impossible.

didyouknow?

How many sit-ups or crunches does it take to turn tummy fat into tight muscle? None. You can't turn fat tissue into muscle. Contracting your abdominal muscles in a crunch "will strengthen those fibers, but that has nothing to do with the fat sitting on top," says Kathy Stevens, MA, a fitness consultant in Rancho Palos Verdes, CA.

Stevens calls it "wishful thinking" to believe that exercising one spot on your body will take off fat there. "We cling to that belief, though we've been told time and again that there's no such thing as spot reduction," she says. "Fat loss is systemic."

healthtip

You work on your strength and endurance, but when was the last time you worked on your equilibrium? Vonda Wright, MD, an orthopedic surgeon at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, cautions against taking your balance for granted. "When women fall down and break a hip, 50 percent of them don't return to pre-fall function," says Dr. Wright, coauthor of the upcoming book *Fitness After 40: How to Stay Strong at Any Age*.

Muscle strength helps you maintain your equilibrium, but it's not enough, she adds. If you're wobbly, you need to do activities that will build up your balance. To test yourself, place your fingertips on the tabletop. Close your eyes, and stand on one leg. You should be able to balance for twenty seconds.

What to do: To increase balance, Dr. Wright suggests getting into the habit of standing on one leg while washing dishes or brushing your teeth. If that becomes easy, close your eyes to increase the challenge.