

Remove it with Light

By David J. Goldberg, M.D.

Once upon a time, hair removal belonged to the field of Aesthetics in temporary, time-consuming options like waxing and electrolysis. Then in 1995, the medical field revolutionized the beauty arena with a simple, safe, and more permanent approach using a concentrated beam of light, and laser hair removal was born. Most exciting was its ability to leave the skin soft and hair-free and discourage new growth for extensive periods of time.

Additionally promising was its efficiency in treating large and/or thick areas of growth, such as legs, bikini and back, that were impractical to treat with the one-hair-at-a-time electrolysis method. And most welcome was its ability to do the job without significant risk of scarring or distorting the color of the skin. Typically, a laser procedure takes 15-20 minutes and is conducted in a series of treatments determined by the amount and type of hair and condition of the skin.

Today's techniques have become so refined you can schedule them into your day like any other appointment and with no recuperation time. During the procedure the skin remains normal in color or slightly pink. The sensation experienced by the patient is, at most, like a rubber band snapping on the skin--usually considerably less uncomfortable than waxing or electrolysis. (For sensitive patients a topical cream can be applied first so there is no discomfort whatsoever.)

Nothing touches the skin except the light of the laser, which gets absorbed by the hair. Hundreds of hairs are treated with each laser light impact so that large areas such as the back of the legs can be treated in 30 minutes. The patient is, at most, like a rubber band snapping on the skin--usually considerably less uncomfortable than waxing or electrolysis. (For sensitive patients a topical cream can be applied first so there is no discomfort whatsoever.)

Nothing touches the skin except the light of the laser, which gets absorbed by the hair. Hundreds of hairs are treated with each laser light impact so that large areas such as the back of the legs can be treated in 30 minutes. The results are immediate and dramatic. Hairs fall out during the procedure and up to three weeks after, leaving the skin smooth and silky and free of ingrown hairs. Future hair growth becomes increasingly thinner, less dense, lighter in color and finer in quality.

Initially, laser procedures were limited in application. Hair removal techniques work on the principle that laser light is absorbed into the hair pigment, transmitting the heat to the roots where it zaps the growth center of the hair.

This restricted treatments to people with dark hair and fair skin. Darker skin pigment too readily absorbed the light, and was damaged along with the dark hair.

Today, laser treatment offers three types of hair removal technologies that are safe for darker ethnic skin types. These systems also offer welcome relief from a medical condition known as PFB (Pseudo-Folliculitis Barbae) or shaving bumps. PFB is common among people with curly hair and dark skin, where new hair growth curls back and reenters the skin after shaving, causing inflammation and irritation.

According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 12 million African-American men suffer from PFB, as well as an unknown number of men and women of other ethnic backgrounds, including Hispanic, Arabic, and Mediterranean. By removing the hair follicles, the lasers provide PFB sufferers with unprecedented long-term relief and smooth, blemish-free results. The laser revolution makes it possible for people with all skin types to safely, comfortably, and affordably eliminate unwanted hair. With summer a few months away, laser hair removal can give you the look you've always wanted.

David J. Goldberg, M.D. (<http://www.skinandlasers.com/>) is Chief of Laser Research at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, Chief of Dermatologic Surgery at New Jersey Medical School and Director of Skin Laser & Surgery Specialists of New York & New Jersey. He is past President of the American Society for Laser Medicine & Surgery. Dr. Goldberg was voted "one of the top ten laser surgeons in the U.S." by Self Magazine and "one of the best doctors in America" by Woodward/White, Inc.