

Seven Things You Must Know Before Getting Laser Hair Removal

Introduction

The idea of paying someone to zap your body with lasers seems a bit... odd, right?

But thousands of people very happily do it every day. Laser hair removal has grown exponentially over the years. It's fast, it's effective, and it's affordable. Plus it saves you from having to constantly shave or wax that area, which adds up to a LOT of time saved over the years!

The thing is, most people don't know much about laser hair removal. They tend to have misconceptions about the cost or risks involved. Plus they might be skeptical about its effectiveness over time.

This short report will help answer some of these questions, as well as a few others that you may not have considered. By the time you're done, you'll know more than 90% of the population about laser hair removal. This will help you determine if this procedure is right for your particular situation.

What Exactly will Laser Hair Removal do for Me?

The first thing to understand is what laser hair removal actually *does*.

What Happens During Laser Hair Removal?

The first step in the process is that the area should be shaved. This will help reduce the chance of pain during treatment.

Then the technician will test the device on a small area that is to be treated. The first few “zaps” are meant to test whether or not you have any negative reaction to the treatment. If everything goes fine, as it does for most people, then the technician continues on with the rest of the treatment area.

As you might have heard, the lasers that the device creates actually destroy the hair follicles in the treated area. These follicles might come back over time, which is why most patients require 3–5 treatments before the hair is permanently removed.

Is This Permanent?

Yes and no. Laser hair removal *will* permanently destroy most of the hair follicles after multiple treatments. However, some patients will need to do “touch up” sessions every so often to keep the hair at bay.

But compared to other methods of removing hair, such as waxing or shaving– laser hair removal is definitely more permanent.

And the numbers show that 90% of patients experience permanent removal after the 3–5 sessions mentioned above. Those are pretty good odds!

Why Should I Get Laser Hair Removal?

Everyone has their different reasons. Most people choose to do it to save themselves a lot of time. If you spend 30–45 minutes shaving each week, that adds up to about 26–39 hours every year.

Other people choose to do it for a self-confidence boost. They'll now know that they don't need to worry about getting on the beach with a super hairy chest or legs. Instead they can just be proud and do their thing!

Finally- some people just to save themselves some hassle. You know how there's that one or two spots that *never* get completely smooth? Laser hair removal can put a stop to that for good.

What are the Safety Issues, if Any?

Laser hair removal treatments were tested in labs for about 20 years before they were approved for commercial use. They are widely accepted as perfectly safe to use, as long as they're used correctly.

There are a few side effects that can occur, which are discussed in the next section.

Presently there are only a few safety concerns.

Fumes

One study indicated that the fumes generated from laser removal technology are not always ventilated well enough. These fumes might prove harmful if inhaled in large amounts. This is not a common problem, and health officials are still researching the likelihood and danger of this occurrence.

Generally, it must not be too serious of a threat if the technology is still approved for use on tens of thousands of people.

Burns

Some technicians who didn't know how to properly use the equipment have burned patients. There are a few "horror stories" online of people who have experienced negative trips to the laser hair removal center.

This can occur because, as mentioned earlier, the laser uses heat to destroy the hair follicles. If this heat is not controlled, it can cause damage to the skin.

Unfortunately these centers give the rest of the specialists a bad name. Most hair removal specialists are professionals with plenty of training and experience to help their patients.

The Bottom Line

Again, neither of these safety concerns should worry you. Laser hair removal is extremely safe, and it is only getting safer as technology improves each year.

Are There any Side Effects I Should Know About?

There are only a few common side effects when it comes to laser hair removal:

Irritation and Swelling

When the laser is being applied to your skin, it creates a thermal reaction that destroys the follicle. Because this generates heat, there is a chance that the skin can get irritated.

This is similar to the effect that getting too much sun can have on your skin. Even though the lasers don't give you sunburn, they are irritating the skin by causing it to heat up hotter than normal.

As far as the swelling goes– don't be afraid of the area blowing up like a balloon. Instead, expect more of a small inflammation.

Note that this can happen to anyone – dark or fair skinned, male or female.

Discoloration

Your skin is getting blasted with lasers, and the hair follicles are getting destroyed! The fact that this can discolor your skin a bit for a few days shouldn't be too surprising.

This is especially true for people with darker skin. Those with lighter skin don't seem to experience discoloration as much.

Discoloration isn't exactly a safety issue, but you might worry about it if it happened without anyone telling you the risk!

Outbreaks

If you have certain conditions such as herpes, know that laser hair removal treatment can trigger an outbreak.

Long Term Effects

The occurrence of long term damage or effects is extremely rare. Some people do experience scarring, which can result from too much heat being applied to the skin for an extended period of time. If you read stories on the internet, it might seem like everyone and their mother who gets these treatments has some form of scarring.

Fortunately, that isn't true. Only a very small percentage of patients experience permanent skin damage after treatment.

Are There Other Hair Removal Options I Should Consider?

Laser hair removal is one of the most popular ways to remove unwanted hair. It isn't exactly inexpensive, but it is fast, relatively pain-free, and effective.

If you aren't quite set on it, there are a few other alternatives to think about.

Waxing

Most women have tried waxing at one point or another. The idea is that you can pull out the hairs by the roots, thus reducing the amount of hair that grows back.

...the problem is that it doesn't quite work as well as you'd expect.

Even though it normally offers temporary results, the vast majority of people have the hair grow back just as thick as before the waxing. And if you've ever watched the *Seinfeld* episode where Kramer discusses waxing, he says that the more you do it, the more hair grows back!

There are two main problems with waxing— besides the fact that the hair grows back. The first problem is that it is PAINFUL. You've never known pain until you've ripped all of the hair off your leg with a wax strip.

The other problem is that it's MESSY. Think about it— you're spreading goopy, sticky wax all over yourself. Murphy's Law says that things are going to go wrong, so you'll probably end up getting it on your clothes, the carpet, or the pet dog too.

Electrolysis

This method is considered by most to be the only 100% permanent solution to hair removal. It works by sliding a tiny needle into the hair follicle until it reaches the cells that cause hair growth. The cells are then destroyed, so the hair will then release and slide out. No hair will ever grow back.

There are a few problems with electrolysis. For one thing, it can take up to 25 sessions to completely remove all of the hairs. Even though each session is only 5–10 minutes, that's still a LOT of trips to the specialist. Especially when you're paying almost \$100 per treatment.

Another thing is that it usually causes scarring. Even though the scars are extremely small where the needles were inserted, having hundreds of tiny scars can be noticeable if they don't completely heal up. Generally these scars do disappear with time, but it is something to think about.

Finally– electrolysis is painful! It's a different kind of pain than waxing, but it is definitely more painful than using lasers.

Creams

There are a number of creams out there to help remove hair. They work in different ways, depending on which kind you get.

Some creams, such as Vaniqua for example, require a prescription. They work blocking an enzyme that stimulates hair growth. Many people will use Vaniqua after laser hair removal to help keep the hair from coming back.

Other creams basically just do the same thing as shaving cream. They make your pores open up a bit so that the hair can be removed more painlessly.

And then you have depilatories, which actually dissolve the proteins that make up hair. This makes your hair most rounded, reducing irritation and hair stubble.

Even though some people use creams, they aren't extremely common. Most people looking for a more permanent solution either go with laser hair removal or electrolysis. If you just want a more temporary, less-expensive fix, waxing or shaving can work.

Tweezing

Yes, this gets its own category!

Why? Because tweezing is a lot more common than waxing, is less messy, and is not applicable to large areas of the body.

As you probably know, tweezing pulls out the root along with the hair. Many people mistakenly believe that this means the hair will never grow back. The problem is that because the follicle isn't affected, simply pulling the hair out by the root isn't enough.

The advantage of tweezing is that when the hairs do grow back, they won't be as thick as before. The hair will have a tapered end, making it a bit less noticeable. Eventually, if the hair is not removed again, it will grow thicker and become noticeable again.

There are two problems with tweezing, besides the fact that it isn't permanent. Like most other methods, tweezing is a bit painful and inconvenient. Secondly, it can't be applied to large areas of your body. Even though it works fine for your face and maybe your neck, there aren't many other areas of the body that work well with tweezing.

Oral Treatments

Some women experience rapid hair growth due to hormonal issues. If that's the case, there are certain contraceptives available that block these hormones causing rapid hair growth.

Even though this isn't really a way of removing hair, it is something to keep in mind if it seems like your hair grows back faster than you think it should.

To Sum it Up

You have a few options out there– everything from old-fashioned shaving to more modern procedures like electrolysis.

Which method you choose is really up to you. There's no "best" method, although many people believe laser hair removal to be the best since it is relatively painless and 90% effective in permanent hair removal.

That said, many men and women are perfectly content with waxing forever, or they choose to suffer through electrolysis to make sure they never grow hair there again.

What Expectations Should I Have?

Let's break this up into 3 sections– what to expect before, during, and after the treatments.

Before the Treatment

The first time you consult with a specialist, they'll help you determine if laser hair removal is right for you. They do this by examining your skin and getting a brief health background.

Be sure not to hide anything from the specialist. If you scar very easily for example, let them know. This will give them a better idea of how quickly your skin heals.

Also let them know if you have a medical history– especially of herpes or cold sores.

If you're approved as a good candidate, the specialist will give you instructions on what to do between then and your first treatment. Make sure you follow their instructions word–for–word!

For example, even if it's mid–summer and you want to go lay out by the pool– don't do it. You don't want your skin to be tan before you go in– it only makes it tougher on both the specialist and yourself.

During the Treatment

The first thing the specialist will do is clean the area. If a large area is being treated, a local anesthetic may be used. This can take up to 60 minutes to completely cleanse the area.

You'll then put on protective eyewear to go into the main treatment room. Your skin is then pulled taut while the laser is fired. The most common comments about how it feels is the sensation of warm pinpricks or rubber bands being snapped on the skin.

Some specialists will also use a spray to help cool the skin. This protects it from being damaged by the lasers.

As the laser is fired, your hair is literally being vaporized. This causes plumes of smoke that smell a bit like sulfur.

As far as the length of the treatment– it all depends on the size of the treated area. It may be as long as an hour for your whole back, or just a few minutes to treat the back of your neck or above the lips.

After the Treatment

The good thing about this treatment is that you aren't required to go on bed rest or anything. You can go back to regular daily activities, as long as it doesn't involve physical exertion such as vigorous exercise. Wait at least 24 hours before resuming those activities.

As mentioned earlier, you may have some swelling or irritation. That's not a big deal as long as it goes away within the first day or two.

Make sure to follow the instructions from the dermatologist. Probably the most important is to avoid too much direct sunlight, as this can cause adverse side effects.

Things to Know in Preparation for a Laser Hair Removal Treatment

There are a few things you should do to prepare for your treatments. You don't necessarily *have* to do these, but they ensure that you get the best results possible.

And since you're paying good money for these treatments, I assume you want to get what you pay for, right?

Here are the main steps to follow.

Avoid Tanning or Sunless Tanning Lotions

The lighter your skin, the better laser hair removal works. It's always easier to see hair on someone with fairer skin, which is why many people choose to have this procedure done in the winter.

If you spend a lot of time outside for your job, make sure you use a sunscreen with high SPF (at least 30). This will help prevent you from getting too tan to get good results. Make sure that you apply it at least 30 minutes before going outside. This gives it time to completely absorb into your skin.

Stop Waxing and Plucking

These methods remove the root of the hair, but remember that it's the follicle that actually causes hair to grow back. Waxing and plucking shortly before the laser treatment reduces effectiveness, so take a break!

Stop waxing and plucking at least 2 weeks prior to the treatment. At least a month is even better.

Keep in mind that you can still keep shaving, you just can't wax or pluck.

Shave the Day Prior to Treatment

Your specialist should tell you to do this, but consider this a reminder. You actually don't *have* to shave, but it will reduce the pain you experience on treatment day.

Take Oral Medication (such as Antibiotics)

Many dermatologists recommend oral medication to prevent inflammation and discomfort. These don't necessarily help you get better results, but they can help you avoid feeling discomfort after the procedure.

Clean the Skin

They'll actually do this once you get to the treatment site. What they do is remove all lotions, creams, and dirt from the area to be treated. This prevents complications and makes sure everything goes smoothly.

The best way to quicken this process is to just not apply anything to that area on test day. Whether its deodorant or lotion, you can get by for a few hours without it!

Wear the Right Clothing

Prepare to wear clothing that is either loose or exposes the target area. For example if your legs are being treated, wear a loose skirt, baggy pants or short shorts.

This is to prevent clothes from rubbing the affected area after your treatment. This doesn't make the treatment work any better, but it does help prevent irritation.

What's the Best Way to Find a Good Specialist?

The good thing about finding a good hair removal specialist is that unlike plumbers or mechanics, there really aren't a ton to choose from.

The bad news? That there aren't many to choose from.

Here are a few ways to get started finding one near you.

Friends and Family

Even though this procedure is much more common than it used to be, the majority of men and women still haven't received laser hair removal.

That said, you still should ask around. Your friends or family may have had the procedure, or at least know someone else who has. They can point you towards (or away from!) the clinic they used.

The Internet

If your loved ones can't help you, the internet is your next best option. You can simply use Google to find facilities close to you, or you can use a site like Angie's List to help as well. The good thing about Angie's List is that it gives you customer reviews of the specialists, whereas Google may not have many reviews for the clinics you're looking into.

So now you've found a few clinics that look good, but still can't decide which one to go with. Here are a few things to consider while making your decision.

Treatment Supervision

Not all laser hair removal treatments are supervised by a licensed doctor. In these cases, a technician will perform the procedure on their own.

Most people feel more comfortable at least having a doctor supervise the procedure. Ask how the clinic handles this. If you're okay with a technician flying solo than go for it, but most people aren't comfortable with that.

Type of Laser

Lasers can do a lot of amazing things. The problem is that some are FDA-approved but some are not! Ask the clinic what type of laser they use and if it's been approved by the FDA.

Experience Matters

Every doctor and technician has to start somewhere... but hopefully that *somewhere* isn't you! Ask what kind of experience the clinic has. If your specialist is a bit less experienced than some of the competition, see if you can at least get a price discount.

Along with experience goes credentials. Are they a part of the American Society for Laser Medicine and Surgery? Or how about the International Aesthetic and Laser Association?

Obviously these memberships are not required, but it would show that the doctor is dedicated towards development in their career field.

Pictures and Testimonials

Before and after pictures are a great way to see what you can expect from the treatment. You'll likely see a lot of pictures from people with fair skin, as it tends to have the best results from these treatments.

Likewise, ask if the clinic has any testimonials or referrals from recent customers. If they don't, consider talking to another clinic!

Schedule an Initial Consultation

This consultation will help you get to know the doctor, their clinic, and what to expect. It also lets them examine your skin and medical history to see if you're a good candidate.

This is also where you learn about the total cost and possible payment options. Knowing how you're going to pay *before* you get into the treatment room is always a good thing!

Conclusion

Laser hair removal can seem a bit scary to some, but it's actually an extremely safe and proven procedure. It's been used and proven for several decades, with only rare instances of permanent effects such as scarring.

Even though it's a bit more expensive than some alternatives, it is also longer-lasting. Remember that some methods such as waxing or plucking don't effect the follicle at all, so hair will always grow back. Not so with laser hair removal.

Finally, do your due diligence while searching for the best specialist for you. Even if it delays your treatment for a few days or weeks, it will be worth it in the end.

Thanks for reading, and please let us know if you have any other questions about laser hair removal!