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Put Down the Tweezers: Here's the Safest Way to Get Rid of Ingrown Hairs



We've all been there—you're admiring a silky smooth shave or wax job when suddenly, there it is. A red, raised, (often painful) bump, ruining the landscape of your otherwise flawless skin. Ingrown hairs happen, but before you reach for the tweezers or get to squeezing, read this. We asked top dermatologists for their best advice on how to get rid of an ingrown hair, and, more importantly, how to prevent these pesky bumps from cropping up in the first place.

What is an ingrown hair, anyway?

As hair grows, it's supposed to leave its follicle (the area that surrounds the root) and exit the skin, growing straight up and out. But in the case of an

ingrown, the hair gets all turned around and grows back into the skin. “When a hair reenters or gets trapped under the skin, you end up with an ingrown,” says [Dr. Devika Icecreamwala](#), a dermatologist in Berkeley, CA. So why the big unsightly bump? “The skin now sees this hair as an ‘intruder,’ and reacts, causing redness, swelling, and even pus,” explains [Dr. Sheel Desai Solomon, a dermatologist in Raleigh-Durham, NC](#), who adds that this is why an infected ingrown hair bump often doesn’t look that different from a pimple.

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What causes an ingrown hair?

There are a few different things that cause ingrown hairs, some of which you can’t control, some of which you can. On the first list—the texture of your hair. “Ingrown hairs are more common in those with curly hair. As the hair curls, it can easily get redirected and start growing back into the skin, rather than up out,” explains [Dr. Gretchen Frieling](#), a Boston-based dermatopathologist. If it seems like there are more ingrown hair bumps on your bikini line than anywhere else, that’s not your imagination. Because pubic hair is more coarse and curly, you’re more likely to develop ingrowns in this area, adds Dr. Icecreamwala.

As far as things that you can control, this is where your preferred method of hair removal comes into play. Shaving can be potentially more problematic than waxing, particularly if you’re trying to get a super close shave. “If the hairs are shaved too close to the skin, they tend to have a sharp edge which can reenter the skin and cause an ingrown,” says Dr. Icecreamwala.

Tweezing, especially along your bikini line, can lead to bumps too, since it can leave a fragment of hair under the skin surface and lead to inflammation, notes Dr. Frieling.

Are there ways to prevent ingrown hairs?

In a word, yes. If you want to stick with shaving, do so in the direction of the hair. “Going against the grain may allow for a closer shave, but the closer the shave, the easier it is for your hair to curl back into your skin,” says Frieling. And when you do shave, make sure the blade you’re using is fresh and sharp; the duller the blade, the more you’re scraping the skin, upping the likelihood of irritation and ingrowns, she adds.

No matter your hair removal method, exfoliating regularly is a surefire way to help prevent dead skin cells from blocking the hair follicles, says Dr. Icecreamwala. Swipe-on pads make daily exfoliation easier and faster than

ever. Try SweetSpot Labs Buff & Brighten Body Exfoliating Pads (\$25; [ulta.com](https://www.ulta.com)), which work well on the bikini area, legs, and underarms.

How can I get rid of ingrown hairs?

All the derms we spoke with advise against popping or tweezing an ingrown hair bump, warning that this ups the likelihood of infection and isn't a guaranteed way to remove the hair. Patience is a virtue when it comes to ingrown hair removal; your best bet is to simply do a few things that will help the hair come out on its own faster.

Start by applying a warm compress to the area, since the heat will soften the skin, says Dr. Solomon. Then, very gently, exfoliate the skin trapping the hair. "Move a washcloth or clean, soft-bristled toothbrush over the area in a circular motion for several minutes," she suggests. "This helps remove dead skin cells so the hair is more likely to emerge." You can also double this up with chemical exfoliation, using an ingrown hair treatment that contains salicylic acid, a choice ingredient for dissolving the dead skin cells that would otherwise keep that ingrown hair submerged under the skin for longer, says Dr. Solomon. We like Jack Black Bump Fix Razor Bump & Ingrown Hair Solution (\$27; [sephora.com](https://www.sephora.com)).

Also important: If you're dealing with a very inflamed, painful ingrown hair bump, avoid tight clothing and synthetic fabrics. Nylon leggings, skinny jeans, and polyester underwear can rub against the skin, further exacerbating the irritation, points out Dr. Frieling.

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