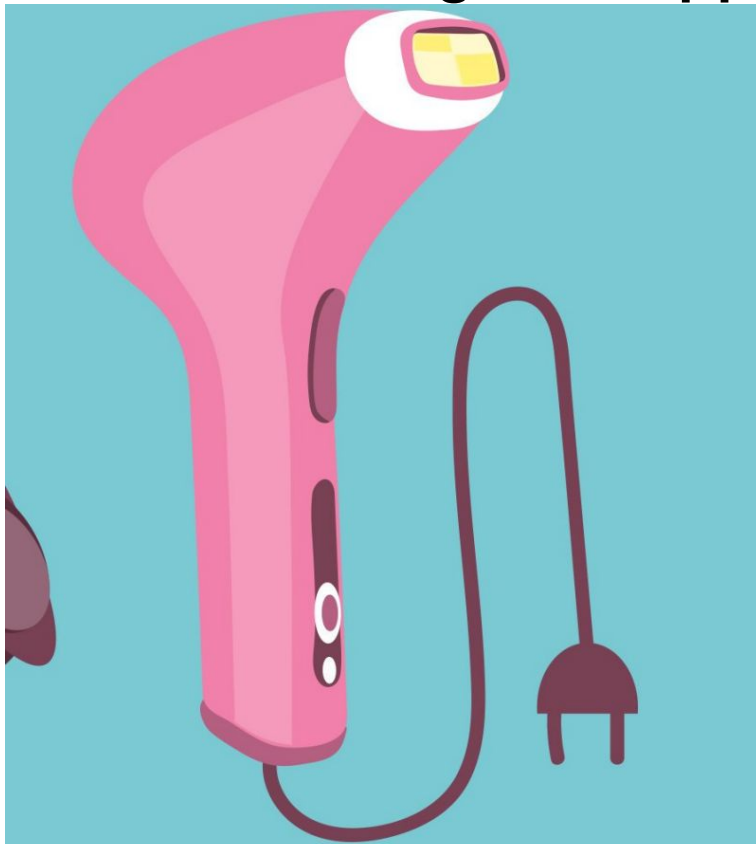


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Thinking About Getting Laser Hair Removal? Read This Before Booking Your Appointment



From how it works to where to get it done, here are the answers to everything you've been wondering about this long-lasting hair removal treatment. The prospect of never having to shave, tweeze, or wax your body hair—or deal with painful ingrown hairs—sounds like a dream to some people. That dream could become a reality thanks to the rise of laser hair removal, a long-lasting (though more expensive) solution that many people with unwanted body hair swear by.

How does laser hair removal work?

This hair removal process targets the dark pigment in your hair follicles, stunting the potential growth of future hair, is now more readily available to consumers than ever. In almost every town and city, you'll likely find a shop offering this hair removal service. But before you take the plunge and laser away your body hair, there are a few things you need to know. To get to the bottom of this hairy situation, we went to **Sheel Desai Solomon, MD, a board-certified dermatologist practicing in the Raleigh-Durham North Carolina** area, for the lowdown on laser hair removal.

Where should you get laser hair removal done—at a spa or doctor's office? According to Dr. Solomon, this question is a bit tricky because it totally depends on the quality of the spa, the equipment, and the training of the staff in question.

“While it's easy to find a spa or salon that offers laser hair removal, the person doing the treatment won't necessarily be qualified or licensed,” she says. “In fact, licensing requirements for laser hair removal providers are at the discretion of each state, and some states have no requirements at all.” Dr. Solomon points out, for example, that the state of Virginia has no requirements for this treatment. There, she says, “technicians who claim to be certified only have a background in cosmetology. A cosmetology license will only teach you about the chemistry of the hair and how it grows, but it doesn't give you the practical knowledge and experience required to ensure safety.”

Dr. Solomon adds that, although state medical boards do their best to keep up with the changing technology, the fact remains that the rule-making process takes time. The rules passed to address a certain issue—such as laser hair removal—are out of date within six months, and are often broadly drafted, and therefore don't specifically address the safety concerns of every individual treatment.

However, not knowing the rules of the game may not even be the spa owner's fault. “It's often impossible for practitioners to find the rules that apply to them, so businesses open and offer services they shouldn't be offering,” Dr. Solomon says.

What should people look for in a safe laser hair removal treatment?

As Dr. Solomon explains, there's a wide range of lasers that can be used for hair removal. Not all, however, have been FDA-approved. “Some are better for certain skin and hair types than others,” she says. “If you're insistent on

going to a spa for laser hair removal, ask your facility for the name of the machine they use and look it up on the 510(k) database on the FDA's website."

Dr. Solomon prefers patients to at least seek out a medical spa as opposed to a "regular spa" for laser hair removal. Look for a medical spa or a laser hair removal center that's run by a doctor in one of the four core aesthetic specialties: dermatology, plastic surgery, ENT (or otolaryngology), or ophthalmology. That's because doctors from these core specialties are required to understand the different lasers in residency and on their board exams, while non-core doctors are not. "Because laser hair removal is all about choosing the right laser for your skin type, the professional performing it must also be the one to examine you and determine which laser is best," she adds.

Are there any laser hair removal risks?

Because it's such a popular hair removal option, you may think laser hair removal isn't a big deal, but that's not entirely true. "If done wrong, you're risking more than a nick," she says about the worst-case scenario. "The procedure can cause disfiguring burns and permanent scars."

Though rare, the Mayo Clinic also notes that laser hair removal can cause blistering, crusting, or other changes in skin texture. It reads, "Other rare side effects include graying of treated hair or excessive hair growth around treated areas, particularly on darker skin."

Other than these risks, are there any other cons to know about?

Although laser hair removal can and does work wonders for some, it will likely not result in permanent hair removal. Both the Mayo Clinic and Dr. Solomon note that multiple treatments are needed for initial hair removal. From there, you'll need to commit to maintenance treatments in the future. The treatment, which can cost anywhere from \$200–\$500 per session, is also most effective for people with light skin and dark hair.

So, before going under the laser, make sure to have a frank conversation with your doctor or practitioner about the risks, equipment, and whether or not it's the right hair removal treatment for you. And of course, you're always free to choose to leave your body hair in place—the decision is completely yours.

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