

What You Can Do If You Have Excess Hair

What is hirsutism?

Hirsutism is a condition in which there is excessive growth of hair on the face or body. Although hirsutism can occur in both men and women, it is usually only a problem for women.

Women with hirsutism have dark, thick hair on their face, chest, abdomen and back. This thick, dark hair is different from the hair that some women have on their upper lip, chin, breasts, stomach or the fine “baby” hair all over their body.

What causes hirsutism?

Hirsutism can be caused by hair follicles that are overly sensitive to male hormones (called *androgens*), or it can be caused by abnormally high levels of these hormones. A very high level of male hormones may also be caused by tumors.

Some medicines can cause excessive hair growth. These medicines include birth control pills, hormones and anabolic steroids. Also, women of Mediterranean ancestry, Middle-Eastern women, Hispanic women and African American women tend to have more body hair than women of Native American or Asian ancestry. Hirsutism seems to run in families. Your family doctor may want to do some tests to find out what is causing the hirsutism.

When should I see my doctor about hirsutism?

See your doctor if you have a sudden increase in facial or body hair. Also, if your periods have become irregular or if your voice has become deeper, you should see your doctor.

What can I do to get rid of the excess hair?

If you're overweight, lose weight. Losing weight reduces the amount of hormones in your body that cause increased hair growth. Below are some other ways to eliminate excess facial and body hair:

- **Shaving** is the safest and easiest method of removing hair. However, you will have stubble unless you shave every day. Your skin may become irritated with frequent shaving. If your skin becomes irritated, apply a small amount of 1% hydrocortisone cream.

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- **Depilatories**, or creams that remove hair, can also be used. They leave no stubble. However, these creams may irritate your skin. To test how sensitive your skin is, apply a small amount of cream on the inside of a wrist. Wait for one day before applying the cream to other parts of your body. If you don't have a reaction to the cream, it's probably okay to use that cream.
 - **Bleaching** paste may also be used. Apply the paste to your skin and let it remain for 15 to 30 minutes. Bleaching products can also irritate your skin.
 - **Electrolysis** gets rid of hair permanently by delivering a small electrical current through a needle placed into the hair follicle. Electrolysis is expensive and time consuming. If you choose to have electrolysis, make sure the operator is qualified and licensed. Home electrolysis products and electronic tweezers don't work well and are not recommended.
 - **Plucking and waxing** can cause skin irritation and make the hair grow faster by increasing the blood supply to the follicle. These methods aren't recommended.

Are there medicines to treat hirsutism?

Yes, your doctor may prescribe medicine to decrease excess hair growth. However, the medicine usually takes three to six months to work and will only decrease the amount of new hair growth. It is less likely to change the amount of hair you already have.

Where can I find out more information about hirsutism?



You can obtain more information about hirsutism from the Daughters of Hirsutism Association or the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. You can contact these organizations by writing or calling:

American Society for Reproductive Medicine
1209 Montgomery Highway
Birmingham, AL 35216-2809
Telephone: 205-978-5000



This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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