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# SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR HAIR REDUCTION

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A woman may learn about the many signs of perimenopause from her doctor, mother, and/or peers with the most talked-about topics being hot flashes, weight gain, libido, and mood swings – not the beard or moustache they are growing! Women attempt many different strategies to hide or minimize unsightly and embarrassing hair growth, with an increasing trend towards laser hair removal. According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, over one million laser hair reduction procedures were performed in 2013, ranking it fourth in popularity with other minimally-invasive procedures, including chemical peels and microdermabrasion. As a professional waxer and laser technician, I am always experiencing the many facets of hormonal skin and hair changes while learning about the limitations and benefits of the technology and ingredients aestheticians use on a daily basis. The bottom line is that women and men both experience unwanted hair growth and want simple solutions that do not cost too much, but are effective at helping them achieve the results they desire.



## WHY WE WANT HAIR REMOVAL

For centuries, men and women have exercised means to remove unwanted hair from parts of the face and body by shaving, tweezing, and waxing. Today, there is technology to produce synthetic waxes that are gentle on the skin, as well as electrolysis and lasers to damage hair follicles and prevent future growth. Our culture embraces a soft, smooth,

and hair-free face and body on women – but nature has no preference. Women naturally grow hair and – depending on the stage of her life and hormonal trend – she can grow a beard, chest hair, abdominal hair, and excessive groin hair, all of which are embarrassing and a challenge to reduce.

Just as women prefer less hair, so do modern men. Male grooming is a rapid-growing market and having the knowledge, ingredients, and tools to help a man achieve his best look is valuable to retaining male clientele. As an aesthetician, I believe the most important part of caring for male clientele is simplicity. Men want to be masculine, they want their skin to feel good, and they prefer low-maintenance, which is why many products marketed toward men have multiple benefits in a single bottle.

## HOW THE PROCEDURES ARE PERFORMED

Experiments with laser hair removal developed in the 1970s and continue to be researched for ef-

fectiveness. This makes continuing education resources for technicians vital. Today, YAG laser and intense pulsed light (IPL) are staples in hair reduction and have been paired with ancillary cooling devices to help control client comfort. Although innovative, they come with limitations. The best means to deliver optimal customer service is by educating clients about skin, specific technology, and what expectations may come from the procedure, including:

- What is the client's Fitzpatrick type and hair type? The ideal condition for laser hair reduction will be dark hair with dark bulbs, not too dense, and Fitzpatrick score of I to III. However, YAG technology enables laser hair reduction on Fitzpatrick score up to VI, as long as the hair and hair bulb are dark. Lasers work by targeting the melanin in the hair bulb. Grey, white, and blonde hairs do not have the necessary melanin for laser hair reduction to work.



- How many treatments will they need to have performed? As a standard, I tell all my laser clients that it can take up to 12 sessions to see the best reduction results, and to expect up to a 70 percent reduction in hair density. Longtime waxing clients may already have sparse hair growth and weak follicles. As a result, they may see ideal results in as few as six sessions of laser hair reduction.

Consistency is key and an important factor in the success of many hair reduction procedures. Sessions should occur every six weeks without delay. As technicians, we hear clients say, “Well, I have a trip...” or “It will have to wait until...” No matter what the excuse may be, skipping or post-poning procedures can have an impact on the results that may be achieved.

Unfortunately, not all clientele fit into the mold of the perfect hair reduction candidate. Ethnic, hormonal, and hair density considerations are necessary to determining the safest hair reduction treatment. Fitzpatrick V and VI skin colors are not photosensitive, which is an important variable because *photo* relates to light, and lasers utilize light to damage the follicle and reduce hair growth. However, certain ethnic groups may or may not be dark-skinned, but tend to hyperpigment and may be hypersensitive. These may include: African American, Asian, Malaysian, Islander, Hispanic, Latino, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Native American. Always err on the side of safety when performing a laser hair reduction procedure on clientele with one or a combination of these ethnic groups.

Hormonal variables can be the most physically and emotionally challenging to a client and technician. Women experiencing fluctuations of certain hormones may develop hair on the lip and/or chin, while losing hair on the pubic region, underarms, and legs. Pregnant women may experience an increase in hair growth along their inner thighs and

the abdomen, while women who have been diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) may have an increase in hair growth anywhere on the body, from the chin to the toes. Another important variable for professionals to consider is melasma, or hormonal hyperpigmentation patterns on the client’s face. Heat and trauma to the skin can worsen the condition. Pre-treating the skin at home with a melanin suppression product system at least two weeks

prior to professional treatment may improve results. Understand that it is always best to be straightforward when consulting women with hormonal-patterned hair growth. Every woman who is experiencing an increase in hair growth should be referred to a gynecologist for diagnosis and testing since each case may be different. Without making an effort to treat the cause – which is hormonal fluctuation – hair reduction treatments will have minimal or poor results.



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Thick, deep-rooted, and dense hair is another very important variable to consider with laser hair reduction procedures. During the procedure, heat is generated to damage the follicle, which is why keeping the skin cool is important to reduce damaging side effects. A man's beard is the most common region that presents this type of hair. Many male clients complain of shaving, dermatitis, folliculitis, and increased sensitivity from frequent shaving. IPL or YAG hair reduction is an ideal treatment to soften the hair growth and reduce some of the side effects of shaving, if a man has dark follicles and hair growth. White or grey hair will not be removed with laser hair reduction.

#### HOW WAXING IS BENEFICIAL FOR LASER HAIR REMOVAL CLIENTELE

Waxing is – and continues to be – a very viable and inexpensive means to remove unwanted hair. It is more prevalent

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during the summer months, whereas laser is more often performed in the fall and winter. Like laser hair reduction, wax professionals must consider many variables to prevent skin damage. The wax process, when performed properly, removes the bulb from the follicle. Many of my long-time waxing clients have sparse hair growth and finer, softer hair. Unfortunately, they also are more prevalent to ingrown hairs. If they have dark hair, I generally recommend laser for better, longer-lasting results. But we must face it, not everyone can afford laser hair reduction and not everyone is a candidate. Clients with blonde hair, dark hair mixed with significant number of grey or white hairs, and hormonally-driven hair growth are not ideal candidates for laser hair reduction, but can benefit from waxing and/or electrolysis/thermolysis procedures. Additionally, laser hair reduction is about 70 percent effective (except on hair growth that has been hormonally stimulated) and clients who have completed laser

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hair reduction sessions can have the remaining 30 percent easily waxed off for special events or easy six-week maintenance services.

Finding the safest and most effective option should always be the key objective of aestheticians and laser technicians, even if it involves referring clients to a physician or a waxing expert. Women can experience hormonal hair changes with pregnancy, birth control, and the early stages of perimenopause. Without medical intervention, hair reduction efforts are an ongoing battle. The same holds true for men. If they

have a full beard with mixed grey, white and dark hair, they are not the best candidate for laser hair reduction. Regular visits to the barber may be the best referral to help male clients with their grooming needs. As an aesthetic professional, I believe customer service and education are the best practices for success. Be forthcoming and give your clients the best advice to help achieve their skin care and hair removal goals.

#### PROFESSIONAL TIPS

Deliver honest advice. Laser offers hair reduction, not hair removal, and clients should expect up to a 70 percent reduction in hair count. Currently, electrolysis is the only Federal Drug Administration (FDA)-approved device to offer permanent hair removal.

Clients who have been waxing for a long period of time have fine, dark hair, and less hair count. Therefore, they may need fewer professional laser treatments to see results. If they are prone to ingrown hairs,

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laser or electrolysis can be the best option for smooth results.

Post-laser hair reduction clients can maintain their results with waxing services. Do not wax between active hair removal sessions. Waxing removes the hair bulb and makes lasers ineffective because lasers use light to target the pigment and damage the follicle.

Consistency is key. Laser hair reduction requires six to 12 sessions, with appointments every six weeks for the best results.

Hormonal hair growth patterns can vary from each individual and can include the groin, abdomen, chin, and upper lip. Hair reduction in these areas can be an ongoing battle because the hair growth is stimulated internally. Referring the client to a gynecologist for prescription or testing is good service and can help her long-term.

The hair bulb must be dark in order for a laser to target the follicle and reduce growth. Some hair can be dark, but have a blonde, grey, or white bulb; dark hair can also be mixed with grey and white. Clients with this type of hair generally do not see ideal results with laser hair reduction.

Men who suffer from folliculitis, dermatitis, and irritation from shaving may benefit from laser hair reduction. The procedure reduces up

to 70 percent of the hair count and may soften other hair growth.

Do not perform laser hair reduction the day-of or day-before a special event. Follicle and skin irritation may occur, resulting in unsightly redness and inflammation.

There are various treatment options available to women and men who have unwanted hair on their bodies. In the end, consistency is the key to great results and although not all clients are great candidates for laser hair removal, skin care professionals should always remind them that there are solutions to their problem. 



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