

REVIVE

HEALTH

WELLNESS • FASHION

Summer 2010

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Laser Hair Removal

By Dr. Ihab Matta

As the summer approaches, men and women alike want to be able to walk along a beach in bathing suits and shorts without having to worry about unsightly hair. Laser hair removal was approved in 1996 and has grown steadily over the last 14 years with improvements in laser technology. It is estimated that \$1.8 billion is spent annually in the United States alone on hair removal techniques.

I will explain about the science of laser hair removal later in the article. Almost any area of the body can be treated. The most common areas are underarms, bikini and face. The first two have thick coarse hairs and respond very well to the light energy. Facial hair on the other hand consists of coarse and fine (villous) hair. Fine hair doesn't respond as well since there isn't as much color in the shaft as a thick, coarse hair. In fact, villous hair can respond to laser/light stimulation by becoming thicker and more noticeable, which can be very troublesome to the patient. The consolation is that once the hair has become thicker, it responds well to further treatment. On average, most areas of coarse hair respond within 4-6 treatments, slightly more in dark skin. Areas with fine hair can take much more, if they respond at all.

Fear of pain is a common reason given





by patients for their hesitancy to try treatment. While it isn't quite as relaxing as a day at the spa, newer technologies and cooling methods have reduced the pain significantly. In fact, most patients find waxing and electrolysis much more painful than laser.

Risks and complications can be reduced significantly by going to a knowledgeable and experienced provider (more about that later). The most serious risk is damage to the eye, but this is completely eliminated by proper eyewear. The most common significant complication is pigment changes such as hyper (darker) or hypo (lighter) pigmentation. The most troublesome non-serious risk is failure to achieve the desired result. If patient selection is inappropriate, then expectations may be unrealistic and the desired effect may not be achieved.

Prior to any light based technology, one should avoid the sun for six weeks. Tanned skin is actually at higher risk of burning than naturally dark skin. Also, one should avoid using any medicated creams over the area to be treated for a couple of weeks prior to treatment.

While specifics may differ between laser machines, the general concept includes shaving the hair the night before so that there is still some color-bearing hair in the shaft under the skin for the laser to "see". The laser is then applied, some with a gel, others with a conducting solution, usually with some form of cooling. The most common description for the sensation is that of an elastic band snap on the skin. The procedure takes anywhere from 5 minutes to over an hour depending on how large the area is to be treated. After the treatment, the skin feels hot, like a sunburn and post cool-

ing is generally recommended for comfort and to reduce the risk of hyperpigmentation. Sunscreen and sun avoidance is mandatory during the whole hair removal process.

Cost depends on the area treated, experience and skill of the provider, machine and many other variables. One can go to a local hair salon and receive treatment from a technician who had a one day course on how to use their machine or to a physician's office where the science of the technology is well understood. Physicians can also deal with any medical concerns or complications that may arise. Most clinics charge a "package price" to encourage clients to commit to a full series of treatments. Underarms can range from \$50-150/treatment, bikinis \$100-250/treatment and legs \$300-600/treatment. It is important to choose a clinic for their skill and competency rather than on price. In the spring issue of Revive I showed pictures of a woman of color permanently burned after her first and only laser treatment in a hair salon.

There are two major classifications of light technology used in hair removal: Intense Pulsed Light and Laser. The science of light energy to stop hair from growing is pretty detailed and potentially boring to all but a few science nerds out there, so I'll try to explain it clearly. Basically both technologies use light energy to target things in the skin with color (chromophores).

Intense pulsed light, or IPL, as it is widely known, involves a "flashlamp" that generates a light with a wide range of wavelengths (usually 550nm-1200nm). Laser, on the other hand, produces a light with only one specific wavelength. Each laser type (Ruby, Alexandrite, Diode, NdYag) has its own specific wavelength. In this article, I generally use IPL and Laser interchangeably.

The wavelength is important because it dictates how deep the light energy penetrates into the skin and how much energy is absorbed by the melanin (color) in the hair. Shorter wavelengths don't penetrate as deeply as longer wavelengths. The longer the wavelength, the safer it is to the skin since the laser energy passes deeper than the epidermis (top layer of skin), so it reduces the chance of inadvertently burning the skin. Shorter wavelengths, on the other hand, don't penetrate as deeply and have a higher chance of burning skin with color. You notice I made a very clear distinction in the last sentence about skin with color.

Light energy looks for color and doesn't distinguish between color in the skin and color in the hair, so it is very important to direct the energy at the right target. The goal with laser is to "burn" the hair follicle so it can no longer produce new hairs, while sparing the skin.

I often have patients ask me which machine/laser/technology is better and I respond with the same answer each time...it depends mostly on the individual providing the service. As I wrote in the Spring 2010 issue of Revive, "Why you need to go to a qualified provider", the individual administering the treatment is the most important variable in determining the success or failure of any cosmetic procedure, including laser hair removal. Patient selection and individualization of treatment is crucial to avoiding complications and side effects. An experienced technician will understand the physics of their technology and select shorter wavelengths for lighter skin and longer wavelengths for darker skin. An experienced technician can achieve great results with minimum risks using an older technology while an inexperienced technician could burn a patient even with the newest technology.

In terms of efficacy, once again, in the hands of an experienced technician, most of the technologies approach greater than 80% reduction in hair with multiple treatments. On a single session, one might achieve anywhere from 5-20% improvement. Multiple sessions are usually required because hair goes through three phases: growing, resting and dying. Laser is most effective when the hair is treated in the growing phase. Hair in one follicle is in a different growth phase than it's neighbouring follicle. For this reason, multiple treatments are needed to achieve the desired result.

Laser hair removal has now become the standard treatment approach for hair of color. While it is still unable to address the concerns of grey or fine hair, laser hair removal is generally regarded as the treatment of choice due to it's long term results and safety profile.

For more information or
to contact Dr. Matta, please visit
www.drmatta.com
or call: 905.790.6644

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excessive
sweating?

Now there's
a solution!

By Dr. Ihab Matta

Hyperhidrosis

Now that summer is upon us, it is common to have patients come into my office to treat a very troublesome problem called hyperhidrosis. This is a condition of excessive sweating that affects almost 1 million Canadians. Some people like to make jokes about this problem but it can severely affect one's quality of life.

Excessive sweating can occur in any part of the body but is most common in the underarms, hands and feet; less commonly in the

groin, scalp, back etc...While it is normal to sweat to evaporate heat, excessive sweating is not normal and although the exact cause is unknown, it appears that the nerves that control sweating become overactive. People are often surprised to learn that you can reduce sweating without harming the body. There are two main kinds of sweating: thermogenic and neurogenic. Thermogenic sweating exists to evaporate heat from the body so it doesn't overheat. Neurogenic sweating occurs because of

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stimulation of the nerves.

There are two main types of hyperhidrosis: Primary and Secondary.

Primary hyperhidrosis usually occurs at a younger age and is more related to your genetic makeup (it's just the way God made you), unlike secondary hyperhidrosis which usually occurs later on and can be caused by such things as diabetes, hormone disturbance or medication use, to name a few.

There are two other subtypes of hyperhidrosis, focal and generalized. Focal sweating usually affects one or two areas, while generalized can occur all over the body, from the head down to the feet.

What can be done about hyperhidrosis?

It depends upon the type and severity of sweating. Simple things like reducing caffeine intake, getting your blood tests done to rule out any medical cause are a good place to start. If one has secondary hyperhidrosis, then if you fix the underlying cause, the sweating will go away. On the other hand, primary hyperhidrosis is part of your biological make up, so medical intervention is usu-

ally needed. One can start with simple topical antiperspirants containing aluminum chloride. Iontophoresis uses a low intensity electrical current to reduce sweating, I find this most useful for hands and feet. Oral medication can be effective especially for generalized primary hyperhidrosis, but can have unpleasant side effects including weight gain, dry mouth and unsteadiness.

Localized injections with Botox, the only prescription medication approved for treatment, is very effective. Ninety five percent of patients notice improvement, with results lasting 7 months on average.

Thankfully most insurance plans cover the medication cost for treatment and the procedure takes less than 15 minutes to treat the underarms. Surgery is the last treatment option and is reserved nowadays for the most severe cases that don't respond to Botox or any of the other treatments.

If you are concerned that you have Hyperhidrosis contact your family doctor or find an experienced physician on www.sweatmanagement.ca or read more on www.drmatta.com

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extra skin is then removed.

The incisions for the facelift procedure are in front of the ear but behind the little cartilaginous bump in front of the ear canal. It extends around the ear lobe back up behind the ear and then at the level of the ear canal it extends straight posteriorly into



the hairline. The incision in front of the ear can be extended up superiorly into the hair arching forward. These incisions are hidden as much as possible.

Afterwards, there can be bruising and, of course, swelling, but healing takes place very rapidly and most patients are "socially acceptable" in two to three weeks.

This facelift procedure can be performed on people from 40 to 90 years. The facelift operation with all its variations gives natural results so that patients look good for their age. Overtightening occurs with repetitive facelifts!

Once the envelope is tightened with a facelift, often patients will want a little more volume injected into their cheeks and some of them may want the surface of their skin improved with the treatment of broken capillaries, hyperpigmentation, and skin texture. Anti-aging technology of the face includes not only tightening the skin, but also filling the lost volume, and using laser treatments to smooth skin texture, improve broken capillaries and improve facial age spots. Always consult your facial plastic surgeon for all the options open to you.

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