

9 Things to Know Before Getting Laser Hair Removal

by [MELANIE RUD CHADWICK](#)

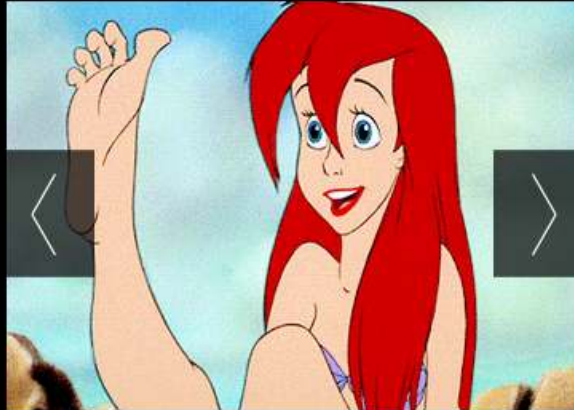
If you're sick of shaving and way over waxing, laser hair removal offers an appealing alternative, especially if there are parts of your body you'd prefer be fuzz-free for good. But since this hair removal M.O. isn't quite as simple as the others (and is admittedly pricier and more of a commitment), it's important to know your stuff before booking that hair-zapping appointment. Ahead, top experts answer any and every laser hair removal Q, including the most-asked one: Is laser hair removal permanent? Read on to find out.

*Image via
thebeautyclinicmedspa.com*



So, Is Laser Hair Removal Permanent?

Technically, yes. "The medical definition of 'permanent' hair removal is achieving at least a 90 percent, long-term reduction in hair growth," says Kauvar. IRL, however, your results may be slightly different: "It's important to have realistic expectations about laser hair removal," points out cosmetic dermatologist [Paul Jarrod Frank, M.D.](#) "What that means for most people is anywhere from an 80 to 95 percent reduction of hair."



And yes, at some point down the line, you may need a touch-up or two. While the laser will damage some hair follicles completely, inevitably some will only be damaged slightly, and certain factors -- age, hormonal changes -- can trigger new hair growth, explains Frank. Sometimes the laser damages the follicle so that instead of producing a terminal hair, which is thick and coarse, it produces a vellus hair, which looks like peach fuzz, adds Kauvar, and those may also become noticeable. At the end of the day, there's no denying that laser hair removal is the most permanent option out there, but, as it goes in life, nothing lasts forever; it's possible that even on totally treated areas a hair or two may still sprout up.

Will It Work On Me?

Because hair removal lasers work by targeting hair's pigment, the best candidates are those who have a lot of it of it, i.e. dark hair, though there also needs to be contrast between the hair and the skin, explains Kauvar. So, basically, anyone with light skin and dark, coarse hair -- coarse strands contain more pigment than fine ones -- is the ideal candidate and can expect the best results. That being said, technology advancements and all kinds of new lasers mean that it can also be done on anyone with dark skin or finer, lighter, hair; just keep in mind that the results may not be quite as successful, so manage your expectations accordingly, recommends Frank. ([See our story on laser hair removal for dark skin here.](#))



To Tan or Not to Tan?

If we're talking real tan, the answer should always be no (the ensuing skin damage is so not worth it), but it's even more of a no-no in this instance. "If you're naturally fair-skinned but go in for your appointment with a tan, there will be less contrast between the color of the skin and the color of hair, and the laser may not be as effective," notes Frank. It's a good idea to skip self-tanner, too, just to be safe, as there's a chance the laser could pick up some of that color as well, he adds.



How Do I Know Where to Go?

Google "laser hair removal near me," and you'll quickly get the sense that every spa on every corner offers laser hair removal these days, but bear in mind that this isn't like walking in for a massage or facial. It's important to do your due diligence and be superselective: "Only a licensed medical professional should be performing laser hair removal," advises Frank. "As with any treatment, there are potential risks, and you want someone who knows how to handle those issues should they arise."



We're not trying to be alarmists, but do a Google

image search of "laser hair removal gone wrong," and you'll see what he's talking about; potential problems include burns, blisters, scarring, hyperpigmentation, hypopigmentation... some pretty gnarly stuff. "Don't let price be the only deciding factor and be wary of overly aggressive sales pitches," adds Andréa Young, owner of [Beam Laser Spa](#)

Image via Giphy

What Should I Do Before and After the Treatment?

The night before your appointment, shave any spots that will be zapped (avoid waxing, since you don't want to pull out the hair entirely, as that's the laser's target). Thanks to new innovations and technologies, the process itself is faster and less painful than ever, so you'll be in and out quickly; a full leg can be done in as little as 15 minutes, says Frank.



Some minor redness afterward is normal, though be sure to stay out of the sun and avoid using any harsh ingredients or products on the lasered area for two weeks afterward, including retinoids, alpha and beta acids or topical acne medications, advises Young.

But remember that laser hair removal isn't a one-and-done situation: "There are three different stages of hair growth, and the laser can only knock out a hair when it's in the active growth phase," explains Kauvar. "To catch all the hairs in any given area in that phase, you'll need about six sessions." How far apart those are spaced depends on which part of the body you're treating -- hair grows at different rates in different areas -- but as a rule, plan on going in every four to six weeks, says Frank. That's why it's a good idea to book your laser hair removal treatments in the fall or winter so that you'll be ready to bare your newly smooth skin come summer.

Can't I Just Use One of Those At-Home Hair Removal Lasers?

Sure you can, but take their promises and claims with a grain of salt. "All of these devices are underpowered compared to the professional lasers out there," says Kauvar, meaning it will take more treatments to see results. As a rule, they also work best on those "ideal" candidates, so if you don't have that fair-skin-dark-hair combo, you may want to take a pass. Not to mention that treating certain parts of your body yourself (ahem, bikini line) will require some serious Cirque du Soleil-style contortion. If anything, consider one of these devices for potential touch-ups after a series of in-office treatments, suggests Frank. One to try: [Illuminage Precise Touch](#), \$245, the first at-home option FDA-cleared for use on all skin tones.

