



WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GET LASER HAIR Removal

written by [AEMILIA MADDEN](#) and [JULYNE DERRICK](#) UPDATED ON MAR 04, 2022

medically reviewed by [MICHELE FARBER, MD, FAAD](#) / Board-Certified Dermatologist

fact checked by [MICHELLE REGALADO](#)



STOCKSY/DESIGN BY CRISTINA CIANCI

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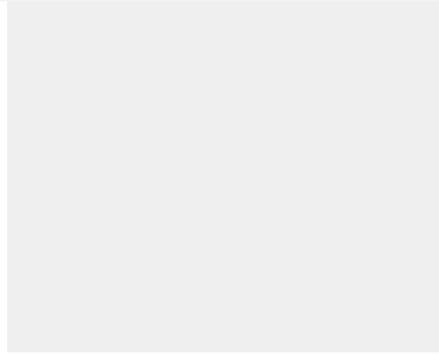
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I've spent years telling myself that I'm ready to get laser hair removal. Sure, it can be expensive and uncomfortable, and depending on the area of choice—it involves letting a stranger get up close and personal with your most intimate parts. But, as someone who waxes and shaves often, to imagine an end to the inconvenience, time, and ingrown hairs that I experience made that tired beauty-is-pain mantra seem like a worthy reality.

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Simply put, there's a lot to discuss when it comes to the social constructs around our beauty choices, and I want to make one thing clear: **Body hair is nothing to be ashamed of**. Permanent beauty procedures, laser included, are an extremely personal choice and aren't for everyone. That being said, for me, laser treatment was not about ridding myself of hair completely. Instead, it was about simplifying my personal beauty routine and making my life just a little bit easier.

FEATURED VIDEO

So, sick of the expense of monthly waxes and feeling ready to finally check an item off my to-do list, I decided the time had come to take the plunge. I walked into my first session at top NYC salon Spruce & Bond (which is no longer operating as of October 2019) not sure what to expect (besides pain). Then, I put on a pair of protective sunglasses, ready for what was to come.



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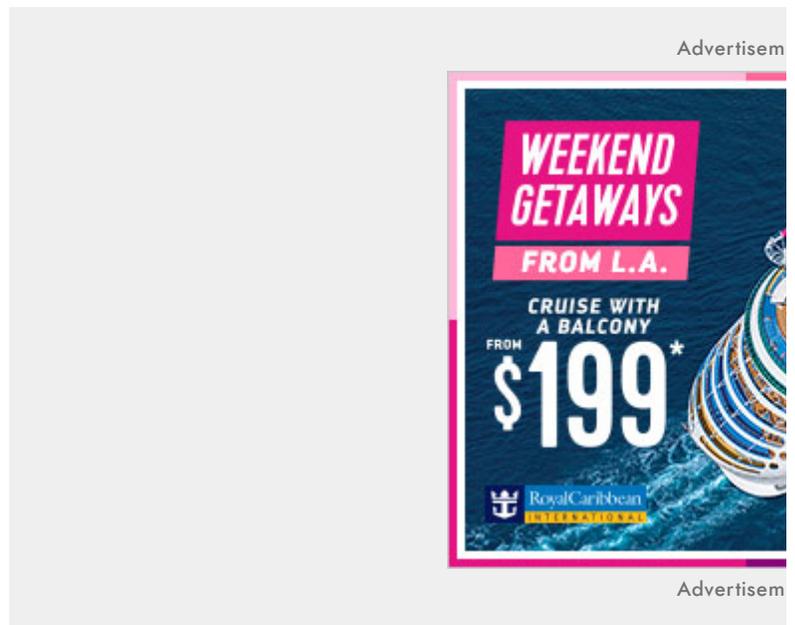
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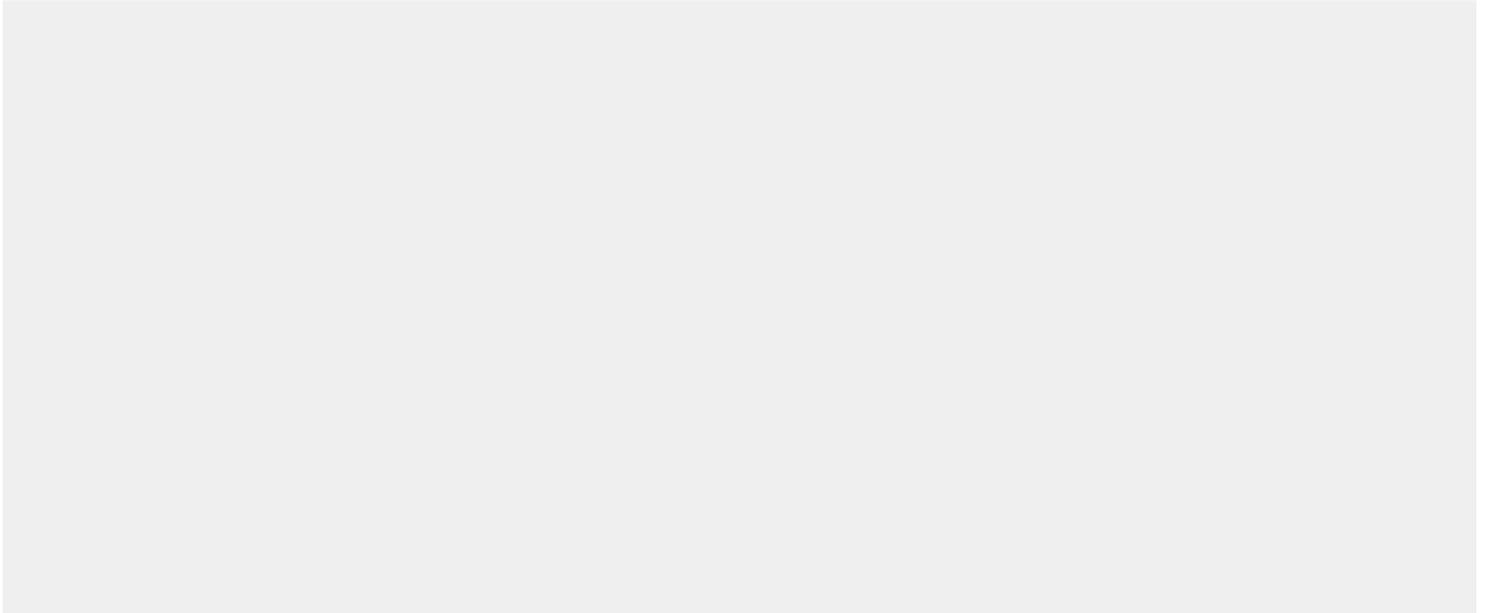
- [Ashley Taylor](#) is a licensed medical esthetician who previously worked at Spruce and Bond.
- [Rachel Maiman, MD](#), is a board-certified dermatologist.

Laser hair removal is one of the most effective ways to remove unwanted hair from the body and face. "Laser hair removal works by sending light at a specific wavelength that targets melanin, the pigment that colors hair, at a depth sufficient to act on the hair bulb," says Dr. Maiman. "The intended outcome, hair removal, results from thermal injury to the hair bulb produced when the energy in the light is absorbed by the pigment located there."

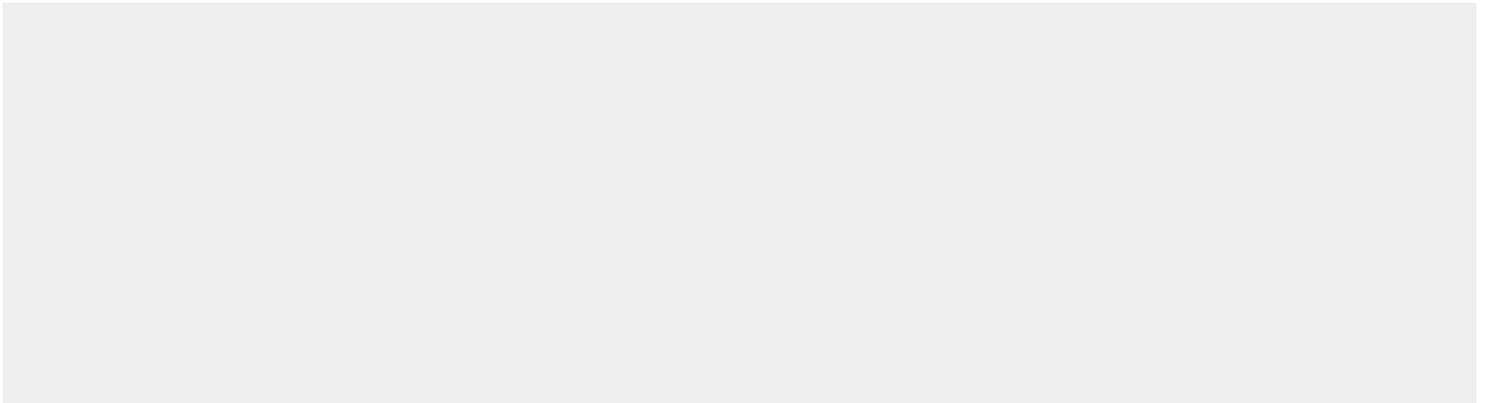


It is important to have a pre-treatment consultation with a professional to determine what type of wavelength will be used based on the patient's skin color and type. If skin

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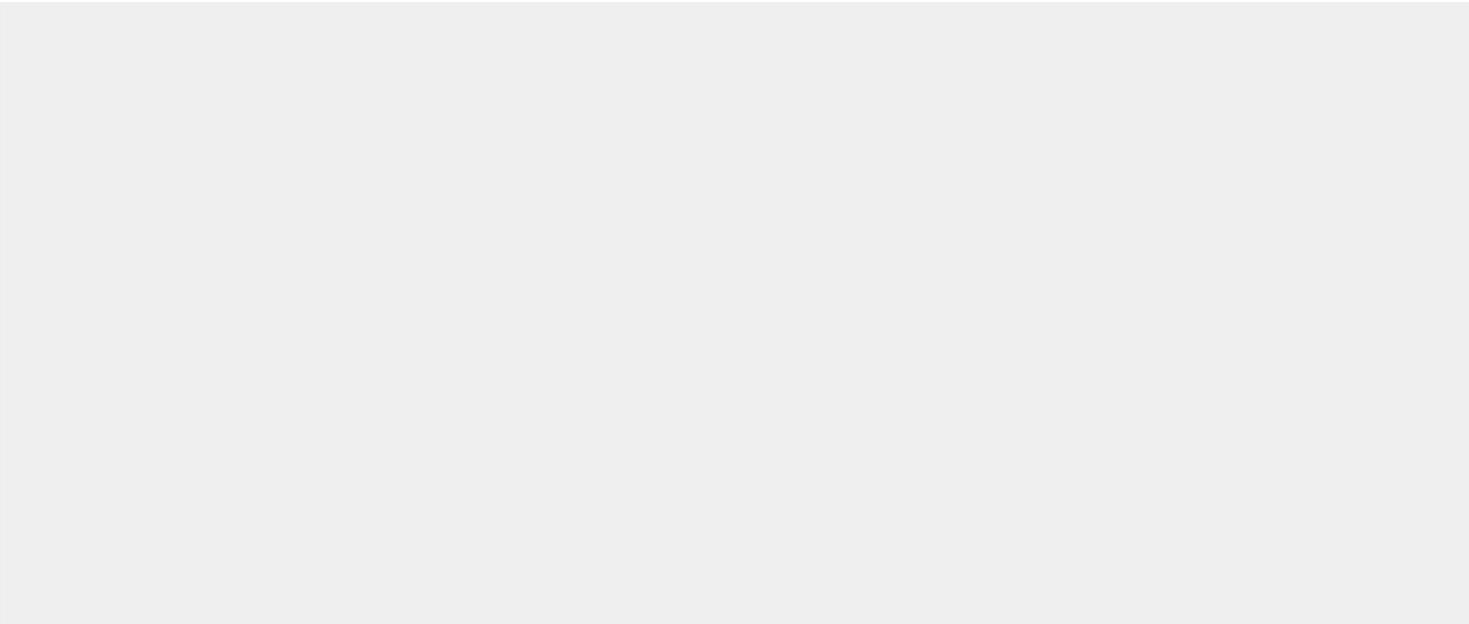


LEARN MORE: [Everything Dark-Skinned Women Need to Know About Laser Hair Removal](#)



The Benefits of Laser Hair Removal

Lasers use pulsed light to target, break down, and destroy the dark pigment in the hair. This is why it works so well on dark hair.^[2] But, unfortunately, this also means the lasers will also target skin pigments, which can cause discoloration.



Lasers and pulsed lights work best on people with darker hair and lighter skin tones. According to Dr. Maiman, "the ideal candidates for laser hair removal are patients with light skin and dark hair. In patients with blonde hair, the laser is relatively ineffective because there is minimal pigment present in the hair bulb for it to target, and it relies on this target for its mechanism of action." However, there are devices like the Diode and Nd-Yag, created to give results to people with light hair or dark skin.

For deeper skin tones, using the incorrect type of machine and lasers can cause discoloration.^[3] If your skin is dark, you should never subject yourself to an Intense Pulsed Light (IPL) treatment. "Those with darker skin are at higher risk of adverse events like potentially permanent hyper or hypopigmentation. This is because they have more pigment surrounding the hair follicle that can be inadvertently hit and destroyed by the laser," says Dr. Maiman. "This, of course, does not mean that patients with darker skin tones cannot get laser hair removal. It simply means that going to a board-certified dermatologist is even more important because it is critical that the provider choose the right laser and use the right settings to minimize risk."

Lasers have come a long way and the technology is continually improving. When you book your appointment, describe your skin tone and hair color and ask the salon what lasers they use (and if they'll provide results with your hair and skin tone). Some businesses specialize in the removal of light hair or lasers for deeper skin tones, making it easier to know what kind of treatment you'd receive there.

How to Prepare For Laser Hair Removal

Once you decide what type of laser is best for your hair and skin tone, you'll likely be told to either shave a day or two before your sessions. Taylor told me to "shave the area to be

You'll also want to avoid tanning and self-tanners before and after treatment. It is possible that you will need to stop taking certain medications to avoid adverse effects, so be honest about everything you take.

On the day of your appointment, avoid using any products on your skin, including lotions, deodorant, or anything else. Be sure to check with your aesthetician about any other things you should and should not do before and after your sessions.

The pulsed light in laser hair removal feels like a rubber band snapping against your skin, although some machines perform differently. Not every zap will hurt and some areas, like the lower legs, hurt more than others, like your thighs.

What To Expect from Laser Hair Removal

The beauty-is-pain trope may feel a bit played out these days, but I can't lie, as I found the process to be uncomfortable. While appointments are quick—no more than 20 minutes for me—my best description of the procedure is that it's as if you are repeatedly being snapped by a rubber band. Different places also hurt differently, so keep that in mind when discussing with your technician the areas in which you're going to get the procedure done.

I was also surprised to learn that there's no guarantee that any area will be completely bare just because you complete a treatment plan. "A common misconception is that the hair will be completely gone after three to five treatments and never grow again," Taylor notes. "You can expect to need at least five to 10 treatments every four to six weeks to achieve a 70 percent to 90 percent overall reduction. After every treatment, you will see a gradual lessening of hair: The hair will start growing finer, lighter, and slower."

At-Home Vs. In-Office

option to maintain improvements between professional treatments," says Dr. Maiman. "The majority of at-home hair removal devices don't actually use lasers, but instead use Intense Pulse Light (IPL), a light-based technology that targets melanin to destroy the hair follicle after repeated treatments. Because IPL emits a broad spectrum of light, rather than a single wavelength, it's safe for a wide variety of skin tones."

Dr. Maiman recommends the Silk'n Infinity 400,000 because its design allows for easy and fast treatment of large areas of skin and it also has five energy levels to customize the treatment. "While extremely safe, it is hard to cover a lot of surface area. These are best used for in-between treatments or small areas such as the upper lip," she adds.

Side Effects

Also on the no-go list: sun exposure. "If a laser is used over a body part with recent sun exposure, it would be too much heat on the skin and could cause burning, hyperpigmentation (dark marks), and scarring." So while it may be tempting to soak up the sun, you'll want to make sure that any tanning is at least two weeks before or one week after your session. Because of this, I'd recommend starting treatments in the fall or winter (especially if you live in a cold climate), so come summertime, sun exposure is no longer a concern.

Also, avoid drinking the night before or day of a laser treatment, according to Taylor. "Often during hangovers, our nervous system goes into an amplified state, experiencing shaking, sweating, and sensitivity to light, touch, and sound," she says.

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Aftercare

Typically, the process of laser hair removal can take around six months with appointments every four to six weeks. But it's not unusual to see some results from the

Costs

This hair-zapping service can come with a hefty price tag and can vary depending on your location and the area you want free of fuzz. If you're treating a small area like the upper lip, expect to pay anywhere between \$100-150 per session, but for areas like the legs and arms you should expect to dish out a couple hundred dollars.

The Final Takeaway

I know it's obvious, but I want to reiterate the fact that everyone will have a different idea as to which procedure is right for them. As with makeup and skincare, there are trends in laser hair removal, but what's popular now does not have to be what's right for you.

While Taylor notes that underarm, bikini, and lower leg seem to be the most popular areas of treatment in her experience, she's seen shifts in preferences over time. "Women used to get the full Brazilian and remove everything four or more years ago," she notes. "Now they're keeping a larger triangle and removing everything underneath. I've heard this called, 'the full-bush Brazilian.'" So know that as a personal (and mostly permanent) choice, this is a procedure that's entirely up to you.

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