



Illustration by Simon Abranowicz

Grooming

Laser Hair Removal: Everything You Need to Know

You don't have to shave, wax, and pluck to get the dolphin-smooth bod of your dreams.



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If you're sick of [managing your body hair](#) and would rather remove it permanently, then you really only have one option: lasering. Luckily, it's a very effective process.

How does laser hair removal work? It's not quite the white-knuckled, James-Bond-awaiting-his-doom experience you might imagine. "Essentially, the lasers release energy into the skin, and the pigment (or melanin) in the hair follicle absorbs this energy, and the hair follicle is destroyed," says board-certified dermatologist [Dhaval Bhanusali](#), adding that darker pigments in hair absorb this energy best. (More on that later.)

So, make an appointment with your board-certified dermatologist to ask questions about your specific case, like how many sessions you'll require, how much it will cost, how effective it will be with your skin and hair pigment. Above all, be sure to visit a dermatologist, and not a medi-spa or anything less than board-certified: "You need someone who understands the physics and science of these lasers," says Bhanusali. "It's especially important when treating more sensitive areas with thinner skin, like the neck, groin, or face."

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If you're considering the laser removal route, here's what else you need to know:

It's a multi-session operation

Unfortunately, you won't be zapping and eliminating all your hairs in one session. There are a couple reasons that you need to visit the doctor more than once, and most men typically require 3-6 treatments spread out over several months, says Bhanusali.

"First, at any given time, only a certain amount of hair follicles are active, whereas others are in a resting phase." This is [how body hair works](#): It grows, falls out, and regrows, and the laser only works on actively growing hairs. The normal hair growth cycle takes a month to regenerate, which is when you come back for your next treatment.

So you have to wear down the follicle, which takes a few sessions until it's kaput.

The **cost of these procedures** will vary depending on how much hair you're removing, since that will dictate how much time is required for the appointment. You should expect to pay between \$250-\$500 per session, but you really can't be sure until you get an estimate from your own doctor. (Always invest in your own wellness though, and book with a trusted doctor.)



“After treatment, strict avoidance of sun and daily SPF is a must to prevent dark spots, known as hyperpigmentation.”

Some hair is harder to laser than others

This may surprise you, but the color of your skin and hair affects the ease with which doctors can administer the lasers safely. High contrast is key: Dark hair on light skin is the easiest, whereas light hair on light skin is challenging, as is dark hair on dark skin.

“Darker skin types can be challenging and I generally recommend [asking your doctor about specific] lasers for these, such as [Cutera](#), to safely do it,” says Bhanusali. “I also can’t stress this enough: If you have dark skin, please see a board-certified dermatologist for treatment, since the complication rates are through the roof in unqualified laser operators.” He says that some under-qualified operators simply take a weekend course to learn the machinery, so be cautious. “We see mishaps from medi-spas come in weekly,” he says. “It’s your body, so only trust people who are properly trained and qualified.”

Laser hair removal is easier and less painful now

Bhanusali notes that, traditionally, laser devices have used small dots to remove hairs, which results in a long, tedious removal process. Not only that, but it could be extremely painful. Recently, however, the company Solta debuted a machine called the [Pelo](#), which covers a larger spot size as well as diminished pain. And, as previously mentioned, [Cutera’s Excel HR](#) allows effective skin treatment in all skin colors.

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On the topic of pain, though: You should expect it to hurt a little, or even a lot. “We like to offer topical numbing medications to improve comfort, or even something called pronox, which is like



Some hair might grow back

Even once your treatments are done and you have the smooth dolphin body you always wanted, some hair can still grow back (or new hairs can grow where there weren't any before). This can be managed with an annual touch up, says Bhanusali, or every other year. "Although, it's common for patients to never come in again," he adds, remarking on the procedure's success rate.

At-home options are available

While they can't compare to the professional treatments, there are some less severe at-home options (like [Tria](#) and [IlluminageTouch](#)), which Bhanusali mentions with caution: "The general belief is that they are underpowered. And, they unfortunately don't warn patients with darker skin types enough that the wavelength can cause permanent scarring or pigmentation. It's not made for their skin types," he stresses. "This is a big problem and something we see too often."



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