



Hirsutism

Hirsutism is excessive facial and body hair caused by increase androgen (male hormone) production. The usual cause of increased androgen production is polycystic ovarian syndrome. Other conditions of the ovary or adrenal gland may also cause hirsutism. Increased hair growth may also be seen in families, particularly in women of Mediterranean ancestry. In familial hirsutism there is no increased androgen production.

Hirsutism is characterized by increased hair growth in locations where hair is not commonly found in women. These include chin, mustache, sideburns, chest hair, lower abdomen below umbilicus, inner aspect of thighs, and midline lower back hair. Increased hair on forearms or lower legs is not abnormal.

The treatment of hirsutism is medical and cosmetic. Oral contraceptives will decrease ovarian production of androgens and increase the binding globulin in the blood stream, resulting in androgen reaching the hair follicles and less hirsutism. Another medical treatment for hirsutism is using the diuretic medication Spironolactone. Unfortunately, within several months of stopping the medication, hirsutism reappears.

Many women use cosmetic treatments for control of hirsutism. Mechanical hair removal treatments such as shaving, plucking, depilatory creams and waxing work well for many patients, but are temporary. There is no evidence that shaving increases the amount of hair or its coarseness. Care must be taken to avoid hair follicle infection resulting in increased pigmentation and scarring. Vanaqua is a cream that can be applied to reduce hirsutism.

Two treatments are available to help with permanent hair reduction. Electrolysis passes an electrical current from a needle down the hair follicle, destroying the follicle. The procedure is tedious and may be impractical for large numbers of hairs. Electrolysis may also cause pigmentation and scarring.

Laser hair removal also reduces hirsutism. Laser hair removal is much faster than electrolysis because approximately 100 hairs are treated with each pulse of the laser. Women with dark hair and very light skin are the best candidates. Newer lasers can treat darker skin individuals successfully. Normally 3-6 treatment sessions are required.