Managing Menopause Facial Hair

by AFRA WILLMORE

Finding Stray Hairs in New and Unusual Places

I was at a dinner party recently where a group of women were discussing how their hairstyles had changed over the years, where they got their hair done, and how often they dyed their hair.

We mused on when was a good age to give up the hair dye and go grey gracefully, which led onto a confessional session on the discreet use of eyebrow pencils and mascara to hide stray white hairs in brows and lashes.

Then one of my friends cheerily proclaimed that at least with her hair turning white, the rogue hairs that had been appearing on her chin were better disguised, since they too were turning white.

We all laughed – it was a relief to many of us in the group to realize that the appearance of stray hairs in new and unusual places was happening to other women too!

The increase or change in hair is caused when the previously predominant hormone estrogen, which creates fine and generally fair "vellus" hair, is overtaken by an increase in the "male" hormone testosterone which results in "terminal" hair, which is thicker, coarser and darker.

Perimenopause and some hormone replacement treatments can cause this change. I think that's what they call a lose/lose situation!

Unwanted facial hair varies from person to person. Some might discover a few stray hairs on the chin, while others notice a change in texture and increase to hair on the upper lip. What used to look like a light "peach fuzz" might transform into more of a manly moustache. Some women even grow a beard. Other women might notice extra hair on their cheeks or forehead. Understandably, the worst sufferers are looking for a solution that doesn't just involve a razor and shaving foam!

Removing Menopause Facial Hair

There are a number of effective methods of hair removal, starting with using a good quality pair of **tweezers**! I keep a set in my handbag since I always spot the hairs on my chin in public restrooms where the light is better than in my bathroom. I find the mirror in my car's sun visor very effective for finding stray hairs, too – hopefully not too many people have noticed me plucking while waiting for my children in the school parking lot!

Only you can decide how bothered you are about the hair. Do you want to commit to visiting a salon regularly, or would you rather use products at home? How much time and money do you want to put aside to keep yourself hairless? How much pain can you stand?

You could try bleaching, waxing, depilatory creams, an epilator, laser treatments or **electrolysis,** where an electric current damages follicles so that after several treatments hair no longer grows back. It's entirely a

personal choice.

Next page: additional hair removal techniques.

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I mix it up – occasional visits to the salon where I get my hairy face waxed or **threaded**, backed up by my parking lot plucking sessions.

If you choose **waxing**, it might be worth looking into trying cold waxing at home or at the salon instead of using hot wax, as it can be kinder to sensitive skin. You should avoid waxing completely if you use steroid tablets or creams or some medications for severe acne (and for three months to a year after discontinuing them) as you could badly damage your skin.

A good salon will have guidelines as to who is suitable for which types of hair removal treatment – make sure you read the small print on the registration form before going ahead with any procedure.

Bleaching will obviously not remove the hair but should make it less obvious. If you buy a product off the shelf to bleach or remove hair, make sure you read all the instructions and contraindications before slapping it on your face. If in doubt, consult a doctor or pharmacist.

There are **creams and lotions** available on prescription which might be worth considering if you have a serious facial hair problem or if you find it particularly distressing. You need to speak to your doctor and expect to wait at least 4-8 weeks before seeing results.

The internet is divided as to whether plucking, shaving or **epilating** makes hair grow back faster and thicker, but, if anything, my experience has been the opposite. Decades of plucking my eyebrows has left them too sparse. Thank goodness for eyebrow pencils!

Here are some top tips for effective plucking;

- Make sure you buy good quality tweezers. Cheap ones will bend and won't have effective grip on the hair.
- Keep them clean. You don't want to risk infection, which will leave you with a hairless but spotty face.
- Pluck in the direction the hair grows using one swift motion.
- Pluck only one hair at a time.

You can also buy home **laser devices** suitable for removing facial hair, but check carefully before purchasing - they are often not suitable for people with certain hair colour or skin tones. They work best on people with a combination of dark hair and paler skin.

I am blonde with pale skin, so the devices are not really suitable for me. I have tried one though (under supervision at a demonstration event organized by the manufacturer) and can report it was easy to use and painless – I felt only a pleasant warmth on my skin.

The most surprising solution is to try **losing weight**. As well as all the other health benefits, losing weight can reduce the male hormones and decrease the growth rate of your excess dark and course facial hair. Definitely worth a go unless you are planning to attend a 1970s fancy dress party and want to keep your moustache as part of your costume!