

Questions?

If you have any problems or questions please call the **Laser Clinic** on **0114 263 2101**



Hair Removal

Patient Advice Sheet



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In order to understand how some lasers can remove hair, it is important not only to consider the structure of a growth cycle of the hair, but also the colour of the hair. Hair consists of a mainly a hard protein called Keratin, produced by the hair bulb, which is situated deep within the dermis.

The colour of the hair depends on the presence of a pigment known as melanin, which is produced, by pigment producing cells, the melanocytes, which are found in the hair bulb. The ultimate colour of the hair is determined genetically and by the type of melanin produced by the melanocytes.

Hair growth occurs in a cyclical fashion, with an active growing phase called Anagen and a resting phase called Telogen. During Anagen the hair is connected directly to the hair matrix in the base of the hair follicle. During the resting phase, however the hair bulb moves away from the base of the follicle so there is a gap between the bottom of the hair and the bottom of the hair follicle.

The more commonly used laser systems for hair removal depend on the hair level of energy in the laser

light being taken up by the melanin pigment within the hair, which converts this energy into heat, destroying not only the hair but the hair matrix and hair bulb at the base of the follicle. The heat generated in the hair follicle is conducted down to the base of the follicle much more readily in an Anagen hair, which is still connected to the base of the follicle, than in the resting Telogen hair, when any heat generated has to cross the gap to reach the future hair-producing region. This is why most effective laser assisted hair removal occurs when the follicles are in the active Anagen growing phase. Because not all follicles are in this phase, multiple treatments are almost always required.

The best results also occur when there is plenty of target pigment melanin in the hair and therefore white, blonde and grey hair can be more difficult to treat than deeply pigmented hair and may not respond.

Treatment

Until the introduction of laser treatment for unwanted hair, a number of treatments were available such as electrolysis, waxing and shaving. Electrolysis is painful and painstakingly slow and whilst waxing

may be suitable on the arms or legs, it can be very painful if used on the face and most women finding shaving completely undesirable.

The major advantage of laser assisted hair removal is that it is effective in most patients and much faster and less painful than electrolysis.

Unwanted hair in some body areas is easier to treat than others, for instance, the bikini area, underarms and leg hair responds well.

Unwanted hair on the trunk, arms and face may be more difficult to treat but will also usually respond.

For laser treatment to work there must be hairs in the hair follicles, so do not wax or pluck them for 1 month before treatment. The hair should be visible, so do not shave on the day before the treatment.

Remove all Make-Up or lotions prior to the treatment. Long, unremoved hair will 'frazzle' on the skin, so remove approximately two days before treatment. The procedure requires a visual surface hair; discuss this with your practitioner. Wear loose clothing if required on body hair on the day of treatment.

The treatment is uncomfortable but is reduced by cooling the skin. It feels most like an elastic band being snapped against the skin. The laser burns hair near the skin surface and you will be aware of a burning smell, although your skin is not being burnt.

Possible complications

We wish to stress that it is unrealistic to expect all unwanted hair to disappear with laser treatment, but very significant improvement occurs in most treated patients.

The pigment in your skin can be affected by the laser. This can result in pigment loss – hypopigmentation, or pigment increase – hyperpigmentation, in the treated area. Both complications are more common and may be more noticeable in darker skinned patients. They are much less common with newer lasers.

Although pigmentary changes can be distressing they are transient and clear after some months.

Scarring is very rare with laser hair removal and much less common than with electrolysis.