

# Laser hair removal

Information and advice for patients

## ***Birmingham Regional Skin Laser Centre***

### **What is laser hair removal?**

Laser hair removal involves removing unwanted hair using laser. The high level of energy in the laser is taken up by the pigment within the hair (melanin), which converts the energy into heat destroying the hair and the hair bulb at the follicle, which is deep within the skin.

Hair growth occurs in a cycle; during one phase (Anagen phase) the hair is connected directly to the base of the hair follicle and during the other phase (Telogen phase) the bottom of the hair and the bottom of the hair follicle move apart slightly. Only hair in the Anagen phase will respond to the treatment because in Telogen phase hair any heat has to cross a gap to destroy the bottom of the follicle. Multiple treatments are needed for laser hair removal because not all hair will be in the same phase.

The best results also occur when there is plenty of pigment (melanin) in the hair so white, blonde and grey hair will not respond.

It is unrealistic to expect all unwanted hair to disappear with laser treatment.

### **What are the benefits of laser hair removal?**

The benefits of laser hair removal are:

- It can reduce the growth of hair by 50-80% after 6 to 12 treatments.
- Hair becomes thinner and finer.
- It is more effective at removing unwanted hair than other methods such as waxing and lasts longer.
- It is much faster and less painful than other methods such as electrolysis.
- It reduces ingrown hairs.
- The results can improve your confidence.

### **What are the risks of laser hair removal?**

#### **Blistering**

Blistering can occur during the first 3 days following laser treatment. This is not common and usually occurs if you have been exposed to the sun or left make-up or perfumed products on your skin. The blistering normally resolves itself within 3 – 7 days and you should keep the area moist with an ointment until it has healed.

#### **Change in skin pigmentation (colour)**

Changes in the skin pigment (colour) can occur after this treatment:

- Darkening of the skin (hyper-pigmentation) is the most common change to the skin colour and is more likely to occur in people who have darker skin or who tan easily. It occurs in approximately 17 out of 100 people but will usually fade naturally in the next 6 months.

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- Whitening of the skin (hypo-pigmentation) can also occur. This only occurs in 1 out of 100 patients but can be permanent.

### **Scarring**

1 in 800 patients have some scarring as a result of laser treatment.

### **Are there any alternatives to laser hair removal?**

The alternative methods of hair removal are waxing, shaving, threading, plucking, hair removal creams and electrolysis. However these methods are often not effective enough for people with excessive hair growth.

### **Preparing for laser hair removal**

1. Your hair needs to be as short as possible for the treatment, just visible above the skin surface. Hair that is too long will be shaved at your appointment, but this will reduce the amount of time you have for treatment. If you choose to shave or trim please do so 24 hours before your treatment. If you want to use hair removal cream please use it 3 days before treatment.
2. Please avoid bleaching your hair before treatment. If bleaching please ensure that the hair has sufficiently grown by the time of your next appointment to show the natural colour of the hair so that it can be treated.
3. Remove make-up, perfume and anaesthetic creams from the area that is being treated. Skin wipes will be available in the laser room for you to use.
4. Please tie your hair back.

### **During the treatment**

The first stage of treatment involves treating a small patch of skin as a test to check that the treatment is suitable. You will need to check the test area regularly over the next week for any signs of blistering, scab formation, loss of skin pigment or increase in pigmentation and report these to the skin laser centre for your safety, although it does not necessarily mean that you will have to stop treatment.

The number of treatment sessions you will need and the length of time each session takes will depend on your individual needs and will be discussed with you.

The treatment will be carried out by a consultant or specialist nurse. This is what happens:

1. You will be asked to remove any jewellery you are wearing around the area that is going to be treated, as well as any make-up, perfume and anaesthetic creams.
2. You will be asked to wear a pair of goggles to protect your eyes from the laser.

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3. The consultant/nurse will set the laser to the relevant settings.
4. The laser will be directed to the area being treated using a hand-held device and applied. The treatment can be uncomfortable and will feel like an elastic band being snapped against your skin. You may also be aware of a burning smell as the laser burns hair near the skin surface, but your skin is not being burnt.
5. When it is safe to do so the consultant/nurse will ask you to take your goggles off.
6. Aloe vera gel is then applied to the treated area to cool and soothe it.

### **After the treatment**

You will be able to go home as soon as the treatment is over. Immediately after your treatment the treated area will be slightly red and swollen but this usually settles within 24 hours. You may also have some bleeding and weeping from the area for a couple of days and your skin may become slightly 'crusty'.

Some hairs will remain in the follicles but will naturally fall out within 2 – 3 weeks. Your skin will often feel smoother after treatment but after that the hair may appear to lengthen.

It is important to care for the area that has been treated by following the advice below:

### **Caring for the treated area**

1. For 24 hours after your treatment you should not:
  - Have a hot bath or shower
  - Use a sauna
  - Go swimming
2. Avoid applying perfume, make-up or astringent lotions to the treated area until the redness and irritation has settled.
3. Use aloe vera gel as often as you need to cool and soothe your skin and promote skin recovery. This can be bought from most chemists and health food shops.
4. Do not pick at the hair or your skin.
5. You can shave, trim or use hair removal creams between treatments when you think that your skin will be able to tolerate it.
6. Do not wax, thread, epilate, pluck, bleach or use electrolysis between treatments.
7. Please apply sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 to the treatment areas daily while you are having treatment and for at least 6 weeks after your last treatment. This is to reduce the risk of changes to the skin pigmentation (colour). You are also strongly advised not to sunbathe or use sun beds or tanning products while you are having treatment.

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### **Your next appointment**

Your next appointment will either be booked by the receptionist before you leave the hospital or will be sent to you through the post.

### **Follow-up**

You will not need to come for a follow-up appointment or visit your doctor unless we advise you to do so or you have any adverse reaction to the laser.

### **Symptoms to report**

If you experience any of the following reactions from laser treatment please contact us:

- Blistering
- Scab formation
- Loss or increase of skin pigmentation

If you experience any adverse reactions from the treatment which can't wait until our opening hours please seek advice from your GP.

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## ***Birmingham Regional Skin Laser Centre***

### **Contact details**

If you have any concerns or questions about this treatment please contact:

#### **Birmingham Regional Skin Laser Centre**

0121 507 6637/6639

Monday – Friday, 9am – 4pm

(except bank holidays)

### **Further information**

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk) and [www.swbhengage.com](http://www.swbhengage.com) or follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

### **Sources used for the information in this leaflet**

- D.J. Goldberg, 'Laser hair removal' (second edition), 2008
- S.W. Lanigan, 'Lasers in dermatology', 2000

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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