

BODY

Stripped Bare

By Gemma Price

Many of us choose to remove unwanted body hair for cosmetic, social, cultural or medical reasons. To temporarily or permanently remove unwanted body hair we look into two methods- waxing and laser.



Hair removal has been a common practice in many cultures for centuries, and the prevalence of revealing clothing and changing social expectations has led to many modern western or westernized women and men undergoing some form of hair removal treatment. There are two methods: depilation, where the hair is removed above the surface of the skin, usually by shaving or applying chemical hair-dissolving depilatories; and epilation.

The latter involves the removal of the entire hair, including that below the skin, so is longer lasting. Instead of hair reappearing within a few hours or days, re-growth can take from days to weeks to occur, and there are many different methods currently available. Some techniques, such as tweezing, threading (where the hair is plucked out by a thread passed over the skin), using an epilating device and even waxing can be done at home, but for a better result many women prefer to visit a professional aesthetician at a spa. Professional waxing is popular as it is simple, effective and long-lasting.

The method for waxing (or sugaring, which uses a sticky paste instead) is a fairly standard treatment in spas and salons everywhere. First, the area is cleaned using a special antiseptic solution, which helps remove dead cells and any cosmetic

product residue, and makes the hair stand up. Then a special type of heated liquid wax is applied and allowed to dry slightly for a few seconds, before a porous fabric or paper strip is applied and used as a tab to quickly pull out the hair. Sound painful? It can be, especially in delicate regions such as the face or bikini area, where the skin is thinner and infinitely more sensitive.

In an attempt to ease the pain which so many women (and men) bear in the name of beauty, some salons offer an anaesthetic spray as part of their bikini wax service. HCMC's Jasmine Spa has been offering professional waxing since opening seven years ago and they say the idea of a less painful treatment is a big incentive for clients.

"We started to offer the spray because customers often said they found the procedure very painful," says spa manager Dinh Tran Quynh Nga. "Our supplier recommended that we try it, and now many people say that Jasmine is the only place they go for a bikini wax, both for the spray and the skill of our therapists."

During my enquiries into personal waxing experiences, a personal friend had recommended Jasmine a number of times, saying she always saw a particular therapist



because her technique was great and relatively painless. For both women and men, selecting a salon or even an individual therapist is always tricky - there's no way to know who is good and who is bad until you're lying semi-naked on your back and that first strip has just been zipped off. Then, of course, it's a little late. Finding your favourite always involves a little trial and error, but taking a personal recommendation is a much better route than just picking numbers from a phone book.

Bikini waxes are, if not the most popular wax, but I also know from past experiences that it's also not for the faint-hearted. When giving a regular bikini wax the therapist will remove hair from below the navel and around the upper thigh, or wherever hair is visible when wearing a swimsuit. With a Brazilian, they want it all. Even if you're embarrassed about positioning your legs into all kinds of unladylike positions the therapist certainly won't be.

I wouldn't say the treatment was painless, but it certainly was bearable, and afterwards the therapist applied some soothing camomile and aloe vera lotion followed by a silver sulphadiazine cream used to treat burns.

"We find this is the best for reducing the redness and discomfort," says Ms. Nga. "We also use a special natural wax for the lips, eyebrows and bikini area - it's easy to apply and contains special oils which are particularly gentle for the delicate skin there."

Waxing the most intimate of areas is guaranteed to make your eyes water the first time - some people find the sting can last from seconds to hours, but with each repetitive treatment, the pain will lessen. The

laser



first session is always the worst, and some therapists recommend taking some ibuprofen an hour before a treatment to help.

Others say that it's all in the technique, and that their clients place much more importance on this than any form of pain relief. L'Apothiquaire says they have so many bookings for Brazilians, that it's hard to fit them in. Only four of their eight therapists can do a bikini wax, and professional Pham Thi Ngoc Bich revealed why:

"You have to focus - be sensitive to the client and how they feel, and you need to do everything correctly. The wax must be heated to 35 degrees centigrade - any hotter and it's uncomfortable or will even burn the skin. Any colder and the wax won't be effective."

At L'Apothiquaire a posable lamp is used to examine the skin, before the hot wax is applied in the usual way - with a wooden spatula following the direction of hair growth. Then the excess is scraped off, the strips smoothed on, and then the big pull, but this time against the 'grain'.

"If you pull in the same direction as the hair, the wax comes off, but the hair doesn't," explains Ms. Bich. "At the same time you also have to stretch the skin, and hold it tightly otherwise it will hurt."

It's also much less painful if all the hair comes off in one go. Less skilled therapists will go over the same part again and again, but good aestheticians can remove everything in one quick tug. The length of the hair also plays an important part in this - hair that's too long can easily be trimmed with scissors, but anything shorter than five millimetres is a definite no-no.

This means that when the hair does start to grow back, it will take around three to four weeks to reach a suitable waxing length, depending on how fast your hair re-grows. In the interim you have to accept that 'in-between fuzz', and although this is softer and slower-growing than shaving re-growth, for a well-seasoned waxer it can still prove unsightly.

Laser

Because of this, as well as the inconvenience and accumulative cost of ongoing hair removal treatments, many women are looking to more long lasting methods of hair removal. Electrolysis is the only established form of permanent hair removal, but as each hair is targeted individually by a hair-thin metal probe slid into hair follicle; this method can be impractical for large areas. Scarring is common, and many clients find the procedure too painful and expensive to justify the results.

Hair removal using lasers or light sources is a relatively new technology that's currently very popular. The basic principle is to deliver energy to the treatment area and maximize damage to the hair follicle while sparing the skin and surrounding tissues. Melanin, the pigment which gives both skin and hair its colour is a natural 'chromophore' – it is much more concentrated in the hair bulb than in the skin, even in dark-skinned people, and absorbs the beam of light much more readily. During treatment only the hair follicle is damaged, resulting in little or no hair re-growth. For this reason, the combination of light skin and dark hair is most easily treated, but the beam can be adjusted for different absorption rates to make it more effective. Ultimately, the number of treatments required will depend on the individual.

Orient Skincare and Laser Centre is one place offering this treatment in HCMC, with eight machines which use patented ELOS technology to provide Intense Pulsed Light (IPL) epilation. Although this technique does not use a laser, the method is commonly referred to as laser treatment and is effective for a number of complaints, including skin renewal, treatment of pigmentation and vascular lesions, and wrinkle removal.

While all this might sound very surgical, it is not – IPL is non-invasive, perfectly safe, and well regarded in the dermatological industry. No sedation is required, there's no pain, and depending on the area treated, a session can take from mere minutes to around an hour for the lower leg. Much like a waxing appointment, this is something you can book on your lunch break and go straight back to work afterwards. However, those performing the treatment are qualified doctors and spa manager Ms. Ha says this is because they have an expert knowledge of the skin and the applications of lasers from their medical training, which means it only takes them a short one to two-week course to learn how to use the machine.

"Most clients require between six and 12 treatments, but it depends how the client responds to the treatment," says Dr. Nguyen Thuy Mai Thao. "Hair follicles have a four-stage cycle, and we need to treat each one as it comes out of dormancy and into the Anagen, or active growth, phase. This is when it contains the most melanin and is most effectively targeted, so we recommend that sessions should be four to six weeks apart to fit in with the follicle cycle."

Although there have been no long-term studies and the most effective treatments protocols have yet to be established, 'laser' hair removal offers long-lasting, low-risk results. It might not be permanent, but increasing numbers of women are finding that the cost of several laser treatments weigh favourably against the inconvenience of waxing or shaving. At Orient, a single treatment for upper lip costs VND1 million, and increases to VND5million for a leg treatment. On the face of it, that may seem pretty pricey, especially considering that as many as twelve sessions may be required. But just take a moment to add up the cost of a lifetime's supply of razors or waxing appointments, not to mention the number of hours spent in compromising positions.

Jasmine Spa

20 Thi Sach street
District 1, HCMC
tel: 08 827 2737
Full Legs USD18
Standard Bikini USD10
Brazilian USD15

L'Apothiquaire

63 Le Thanh Ton street
District 1, HCMC
tel: 08 822 1218

64A Truong Dinh, D1
08 932 5181
www.lapothiquaire.com
Full legs USD20
Brazilian USD20

Orient Spa

945 Cach Mang Thang Tam street
Tan Binh District, HCMC
tel: 08 970 3674

The Manor, Block 1-2B
91 Nguyen Huu Canh street
Binh Thanh District, HCMC
tel: 08 514 3139
www.orient-skin.com
Legs USD315 per session
Bikini USD157 per session

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