

UFH

Unwanted Facial Hair

Learn about UFH:
What are the causes?

Dealing with UFH:
Hair Removal Methods
Prescription Therapy



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Learning about unwanted facial hair

Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH). It can range from a simple nuisance to a severe problem in a person's life. Those who live with UFH know it's about more than the hair itself. It's about the time it takes to remove it; about its effect on intimacy, socializing, and the work environment; and about how uncomfortable and embarrassing it can be.

The good news, however, is the more you know about the causes of UFH and how to manage and treat it, the easier it will be to deal with. This booklet provides the information you need to know about UFH and will point you in the right direction in handling your UFH.



Keep in mind that working together with your healthcare professional will go a long way in helping you manage your UFH symptoms successfully. You can become an active partner in your treatment by learning as much as you can about UFH and how you can manage it through educational resources, such as this guide.

“... the more you know about UFH, the easier it will be to deal with.”

What is unwanted facial hair?

The amount of body hair you have is largely determined by your genetic makeup and varies widely among women. Usually a woman will only grow fine hair (peach fuzz) on her lips, chin, chest, abdomen, or back. However, when women grow coarse, dark hairs in these areas, typical of male hair growth, this is a sign of a common yet frustrating condition called hirsutism (HER-soot-iz-um).

While hirsutism can present itself in many areas of the body, this information guide focuses specifically on equipping women with the knowledge to tackle hirsutism on the face or neck also known as Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH).

UFH is a medical condition that causes too much hair to grow on a woman's face and neck. It typically begins to develop during puberty, however, an inherited tendency, hormonal imbalance, or various medications, can cause it to appear at any age. Sometimes, the cause remains unknown (idiopathic hirsutism). Regardless of the cause, excess hair, especially on the face, can be a source of great distress for most women, leading to anxiety, depression and reduced quality of life.

There are, however, various strategies to help you effectively manage your UFH. Once a medical diagnosis of UFH is made, you and your physician can explore the treatment options available to you. It is, however, important that your physician first rule out any underlying medical conditions.



Do you have unwanted facial hair?



The major sign of Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH) is thick, dark hair appearing on a woman's face. This hair is typically coarse and pigmented and is different from the hair that some women have on their upper lip, chin, breasts or stomach, or the fine 'baby' hair all over their body.

While stray hairs on your face and neck may be not a cause for concern, your doctor can help you understand when UFH is a result of an underlying medical condition.

It is important to pay attention to the development of other signs and symptoms in addition to UFH. Here are a few simple questions that may help you determine whether you are experiencing symptoms that require you to seek medical advice.

Answer 'yes' or 'no' to the following questions:

- Do you notice rapidly growing, unwanted hair on places such



as your upper lip, cheeks, chin, neck, mid-chest, inner thighs, abdomen, or low back?

- Do you notice unwanted hair growth associated with irregular menstrual periods?
- Are you experiencing hot flashes?
- Do you notice an increase in the amount of acne on your face or body?
- Do you suspect there are physical issues affecting your fertility or limiting your ability to conceive?
- Do you notice any unwanted hair growth that appears to be worsened from a medication?

If you answered 'yes' to any of the above questions, make sure to see your healthcare professional to discuss your symptoms so that you can be properly diagnosed, rule out any other underlying medical conditions, and help you to decide the best treatment approach for you.

Who does unwanted facial hair affect?

Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH) can affect women of all ages, skin types or hair colour and can be a source of considerable emotional distress and social embarrassment.

UFH can have a detrimental impact on a woman's physical confidence and quality of life, as it contradicts common cultural and social perceptions of what is physically attractive or acceptable.

Several factors may influence your likelihood of developing UFH.

These include:

- **Family history**

Several conditions that cause UFH run in families. These conditions, including congenital adrenal hyperplasia and polycystic ovary syndrome, are discussed further in this booklet.

- **Ethnicity**

Women of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and South Asian ancestry are more likely to develop UFH with no identifiable cause than are women of other ethnicities.



What are the causes of unwanted facial hair?

Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH) growth in women can be caused by a number of issues. Most commonly, these issues are related to either a hormonal imbalance or the impact of various medications. Sometimes, however, the cause remains unknown (idiopathic hirsutism).

Hormonal Imbalance

All women normally produce low levels of male hormones (androgens). Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH) growth in women may occur when the body makes too much male hormone. Conditions that can cause high androgen levels include:

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (POS)

POS is one of the most common identifiable causes of hirsutism. This condition is caused by an imbalance of sex hormone levels in a woman's body that may result in irregular periods, acne, obesity, infertility and sometimes multiple cysts on the ovaries.

Cushing's Syndrome

This is a condition that occurs when your body is exposed to high levels of the hormone cortisol, a steroid hormone involved in your body's response to stress. It can develop when your adrenal glands – small hormone-secreting glands located just above your kidneys – make too much cortisol, or it can occur from taking cortisol-like medications over a long period of time. Increased cortisol levels disrupt the balance of sex hormones in your body, which can result in UFH.

Congenital adrenal hyperplasia

This inherited condition is characterized by abnormal production of steroid hormones, including cortisol and androgen, by your adrenal glands.

Menopause

As hormone levels, and even weight, change during and after menopause, some women may find they develop UFH.

Other rare conditions

Rarely, tumors in the ovaries or adrenal gland, formed when abnormal cells grow out of control and clump together, may cause UFH.

Medication

Some medications can cause UFH. These medicines include hormones, anabolic steroids and some immunosuppressive drugs.

Idiopathic

Sometimes, there is just no identifiable cause. Excessive facial hair growth in women with normal androgen levels, regular menstrual periods and no other underlying conditions is called idiopathic hirsutism. This occurs more frequently in certain ethnic populations, such as women of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and South Asian ancestry.



How is unwanted facial hair diagnosed?

A number of healthcare professionals may be involved in the diagnosis, treatment and management of Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH), including:

- General practitioners/family doctors
- Dermatologists
- Gynecologists
- Endocrinologists

In order for your doctor to make a diagnosis of UFH you will first need to discuss your medical history. Your doctor may ask you about your menstrual cycles, the time of onset of your symptoms, whether you're taking any medications and whether you have a family history of certain conditions. Your doctor is likely to:

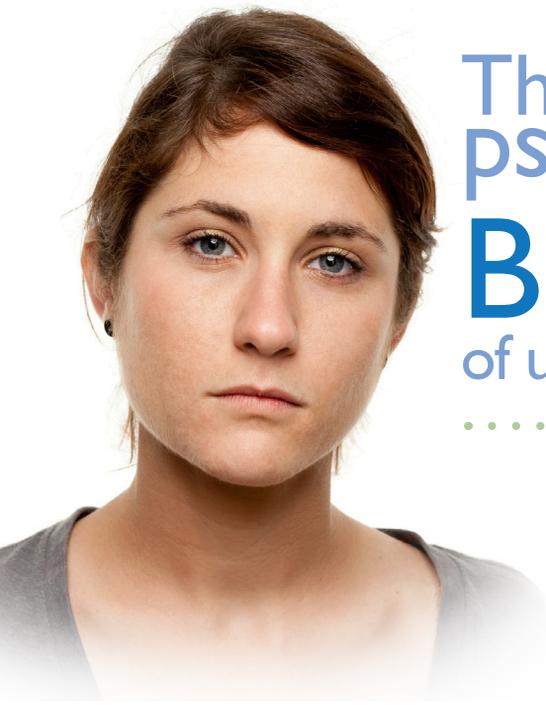
1. Perform a physical exam. Your doctor will examine your face. He or she may also conduct a physical examination to check for other signs of androgen excess and for conditions that can result in a hormonal imbalance.

2. Order blood tests. Tests that measure the amount of certain hormones in your blood, including testosterone,

may help determine whether your UFH is caused by elevated androgen levels.

3. Further testing. The extent of further testing you'll undergo depends on the severity of your UFH and any other associated symptoms. If androgen levels in your blood are elevated, you may undergo imaging tests. These may include:

- **Ultrasound.** This imaging test uses high-frequency sound waves to produce pictures of your body's internal structures. An ultrasound of the ovaries or adrenal glands may be performed to check for tumors or cysts.
- **Computerized tomography (CT) scan.** A CT scan is a type of X-ray test that provides cross-sectional images of your internal organs. A CT scan of your body may be used to evaluate the adrenal glands.



The psychological **BURDEN** of unwanted facial hair

It should come as no surprise to the many women affected by excessive facial hair growth that the unwanted hair is only one part of the challenge. Dealing with Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH) can involve much more than simply the efforts to remove the hair:

UFH can be emotionally distressing for some women. In fact, in a recent survey, the vast majority of UFH sufferers surveyed (91%) agreed that UFH can have a negative effect on someone's quality of life.

Many women with UFH feel extremely self-conscious about having UFH and are even uncomfortable discussing it with others including their own family doctor or other healthcare professional.

Your dermatologist and family physician will appreciate if you are open and honest about how you feel, not only physically, but emotionally, socially and psychologically. He or she will be able to confirm what you have is a common condition and that you are not alone. Most importantly, they will be able to help you to understand that your feelings are in fact valid.

Studies report the anxiety and depression associated with excessive facial hair can affect quality of life in much the same way as a diagnosis of gynecological or breast cancer. Taking steps to treat UFH has been shown to help restore confidence and contribute to the overall well-being of those who are affected by it.

Speak up: take charge of your overall health by addressing the issues, like UFH, that affect your day-to-day happiness. You are your best health advocate.

What are the approaches to dealing with unwanted facial hair?



A number of treatment options are available to help you manage your Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH). The kind of treatment or combination of treatments you decide upon depends on you, the severity of your UFH, and the commitment you are willing to make to effectively manage it. By raising this subject with your physician you will be able to benefit from an open discussion on the best course of action for you.

Remember that before starting any treatment regime it is important to first rule out any underlying medical condition. If you are experiencing a rapid increase or sudden onset of facial hair growth, and signs of increased male characteristics, make sure to first see your physician.

Prevention

While Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH) generally isn't preventable and tends to be a long-term issue, a logical starting point is to determine if there are ways to control it. If you are overweight, losing weight will be key to reducing the amount of hormones in your body that are associated with increased facial hair growth.

Treatment

There are numerous ways to remove or treat UFH. Available options can vary in effectiveness, degree of discomfort, and cost. Treatment for UFH most often involves a combination of hair removal methods and medications. Therefore, a solid understanding of the various pros and cons of each treatment is a worthwhile exercise as part of your decision-making process. This guide will provide you with an overview of the various treatments available by grouping them into the following categories:

1. Hair Removal Methods
2. Prescription Therapy

Hair Removal Methods

Hair removal methods to deal with Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH) include depilatories, which remove hair above the surface of the skin and epilatories, which remove the entire hair including the part below the skin.

Examples include:

Depilatories

- **Shaving.** Shaving is quick and inexpensive, but it needs to be repeated regularly since it removes the hair only down to the surface of your skin.
- **Chemical depilatories.** Generally available as gels, lotions or creams that you spread on your face, chemical depilatories work by breaking down the protein structure of the hair shaft. Some people are allergic to the chemicals used in depilatories.
- **Bleaching.** Instead of removing UFH, some women use bleaching agents. Bleaching removes the hair color, making the hair less visible against some skin tones but potentially more noticeable on darker skin. Bleaching may cause skin irritation, so test the bleach on a small area first.

Epilatories

- **Plucking.** Also referred to as tweezing, plucking is a good method to remove a few stray hairs, but is not useful for removing a large area of hair. While plucking may hurt a little and doesn't



last forever, it is the most common method women use to get rid of UFH.

- **Waxing.** Waxing involves applying warm wax on your skin where the unwanted hair grows. Once the wax hardens, it's pulled back from your skin against the direction of hair growth, removing hair. Waxing may sting temporarily and sometimes causes skin irritation and redness. Results usually last a few weeks.
- **Threading.** Is an ancient method of hair removal originating in the Eastern world. Practitioners use a pure, thin, twisted cotton thread which they roll over areas of unwanted hair, plucking the hair at the follicle level. Unlike tweezing, where single hairs are pulled out one at a time, threading can remove an entire row of hair, resulting in a straighter line. As a larger area of hair is removed at once, however, it can be relatively painful.
- **Sugaring.** Is used in much the same way as traditional waxing for removing UFH although the ingredients used are few in number and all natural typically consisting of sugar, lemon and water. Proponents of sugaring say that it can be done more frequently than waxing with the same benefits and that it causes less skin irritation among other benefits.

- **Home electrolysis.** These tools work by applying an electric current through a pair of tweezers. They are good for small areas, and are quick but can be painful. Results may last for many weeks or months. These kits can be costly and may produce skin discoloration.

Other facial hair removal treatments can offer numerous advantages and, although they tend to be expensive, their popularity has made them more widely available with many estheticians and spas.

The risk is that the level of expertise and competence of the practitioner is sometimes questionable. Not all laser treatments need to be performed by a doctor but it is advisable that the treatment be administered in a facility when there is a doctor present on site to supervise the therapy and to ensure that any adverse side effects are properly dealt with. The most common facial hair removal therapies include:

Electrolysis

This type of therapy involves inserting a tiny needle into each hair follicle and emitting a pulse of electric current to damage and eventually destroy the follicle. Electrolysis results in permanent hair removal, but the procedure can be painful. Some numbing creams may be spread on your skin to reduce this discomfort. Side effects include lightening or darkening of the treated skin and, rarely, scarring. As one hair is treated at a time it is a very slow process



that requires many repeat treatments. It is best used for small areas.

Laser Therapy

Laser therapy is a procedure in which a beam of highly concentrated light (laser) is passed over your skin to disable the hair follicles and prevent hair from growing. With laser there is permanent hair reduction and in some cases permanent removal. Lasers work best for those with fair skin and dark hair: Individual sessions can last from a few minutes to a few hours, depending on the size of the area being treated. Hair on the upper lip and particularly on the chin may need many treatments as they are in very hormone sensitive parts of the skin. However, a treatment for the upper lip takes only about a minute. After treatment, some people experience long periods without hair re-growth, while others may need occasional touch ups to remain hair-free. In between treatments the hair is trimmed or shaved as the melanin target, which is the hair root, has to be present for the laser light to be absorbed. Laser therapy can be uncomfortable, it may cause redness and swelling and can, in rare cases, cause burns or color changes in your skin. This can be minimized by not treating the skin if it is tanned. While the cost of laser treatment can be high it may in many instances be more cost effective due to the longer-term benefits. The most important thing is that the correct laser is used in the right situation and at the appropriate power setting. Make sure to do your research and select a facility with a great reputation and experienced staff.

Prescription Therapy

Two classes of prescription therapies, used to treat hormonal issues, are also used to help manage Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH). The first are hormone blockers, which are drugs that inhibit androgens (male hormones) from working on hair growth. The second are growth inhibitors, which are drugs that block enzymes in the hair itself to inhibit growth.



Hormone Blockers

- **Oral contraceptives.** Birth control pills, or other hormonal contraceptives, containing the hormones estrogen and progesterin, treat UFH by inhibiting androgen production by your ovaries. Oral contraceptives are a common treatment for UFH in women who don't want to become pregnant. Possible side effects include dizziness, nausea, headache, and stomach upset.
- **Anti-androgens.** These types of drugs block androgens from attaching to their receptors in your body. The most commonly used anti-androgen for treating UFH is spironolactone. Anti-androgens usually take at least three to six months to work. They can decrease the amount of new hair growth, but they are less likely to change the amount of hair you already have. Possible side effects include drowsiness, nausea, irregular

menstrual periods, electrolyte disturbances and diarrhea. Because these drugs can cause birth defects, it's important to use good contraception while taking them. Do not take this drug if you think you are or may become pregnant.

- **Anti-diabetic.** Metformin, a drug normally used in the treatment of diabetes, has in recent years shown to be beneficial in women with polycystic ovarian syndrome, a key cause of UFH.

Growth Inhibitors

- **Eflornithine hydrochloride.** A topical cream which is applied to the skin, called eflornithine hydrochloride, is the first topical prescription medication that has been approved by Health Canada specifically for slowing the growth of UFH in women. It is indicated for use along with other hair removal techniques. Eflornithine hydrochloride

is not a depilatory and does not permanently remove hair or “cure” UFH. What it does is reduce or slow down the hair growth to improve the condition. It is applied twice a day to the area to be treated and, when combined with other hair removal techniques, such as the ones described above, enhances the overall effectiveness of other treatment types.



What to expect from medication.

If you begin taking medication for UFH, it will take some time before you will notice a difference in facial hair growth. Follow your doctor's instructions, ask questions, and share your feelings about the results you are seeing.

If you and your doctor aren't able to find a medication that works well for you, he or she may recommend that you see a doctor who specializes in skin disorders such as a dermatologist, if you haven't already seen one.





Taking control of unwanted facial hair

Hopefully, this booklet has answered most of your questions about Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH) and has helped provide you with enough information to understand your symptoms and feel comfortable talking to your healthcare professional.

While you're likely to start by seeing your family doctor or a general practitioner, you may be referred to someone who specializes in endocrine disorders (endocrinologist) or skin issues (dermatologist). Here are some pointers to help you prepare for your appointment.

- Be aware of pre-appointment restrictions, specifically if there's anything you need to do to prepare.
- Write down your symptoms, including any that may seem unrelated.

For example, if you've been feeling depressed or fatigued lately, tell your doctor. Also tell your doctor about any other changes in your appearance, such as weight gain or loss, changes in your breast size or muscle mass, new acne, or patches of dark, velvety skin.

- Write down key personal information, including any changes in your

menstrual cycle and in your sex life.

- Make a list of all medications, vitamins, creams or supplements you're taking or have used in the past. Include the specific name and dose of these medications and how long you've been taking them.
- Take a family member or friend along, if possible. Sometimes it can be difficult to take in all the information provided to you during an appointment. Someone who accompanies you may remember something you missed or forgot.
- Write down questions to ask your doctor.

If you've scheduled an appointment with your doctor to talk about excessive facial hair growth, you may already have tried and been disappointed with at-home treatments. Because your doctor will want to see your hair growth pattern, it's best to avoid trying new at-home treatments in the days leading up to your appointment. It's natural to feel distressed by the effect the UFH has on your appearance, but in most cases, your doctor will be able to help you find a treatment plan that is right for you.

What questions should I ask my doctor?

Preparing a list of questions will help you make the most of your time with your doctor. For Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH), some basic questions to ask your doctor include:

- What is likely causing my symptoms or condition?
- What are other possible causes?
- Is it normal that my UFH is impacting my self-confidence and overall happiness?
- What kinds of diagnostic tests do I need?
- What are my treatment options?
- If the first treatment I try isn't effective, what will we try next?
- How much will treatment improve my physical signs and symptoms?
- Will I need to be treated long term?
- What are the possible side effects of the medications you're recommending?
- Will the medications you're recommending affect my ability to have children?
- How will you monitor my response to treatment over time?
- Are there alternatives to the primary approach you're suggesting?
- I have these other health conditions. How can I best manage them together?
- Are there any restrictions I need to follow?
- Should I see a specialist?
- Are there brochures or other printed material that I can take home with me? What websites do you recommend?

Don't hesitate to ask your doctor any other questions you have about your condition.

Helpful Resources

Here are a few other resources that you may find helpful in your search for information or additional skin care related resources:

- Canadian Skin Patient Alliance (CSPA): www.canadianskin.ca
- Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada: www.sogc.org
- Canadian Dermatology Association: www.dermatology.ca
- Skinergy: UFH Patient Community www.skinergy.ca/ufh

FAQs:



Answers to your most frequently asked questions.

Q

1. Is Unwanted Facial Hair (UFH) a common condition?

A

UFH is a fairly common condition affecting between 5 per cent and 15 per cent of women. At least 5 per cent of women of reproductive age suffer from this ailment. Experts often consider these figures to be an underestimation.

Q

2. How serious is this condition?

A

In general, UFH is a harmless condition. Yet, it can be a source of considerable emotional distress and social embarrassment impacting a woman's body image and quality of life. While it can vary in terms of severity from one individual to another, in some cases the appearance of UFH may be a sign of a more serious underlying

medical condition, warranting a visit to your healthcare professional.

Q

3. Why am I developing UFH now as an adult?

A

UFH growth in adult women can result from abnormally high levels of male hormones (androgens) or from an increased sensitivity of your hair follicles to these androgens. In addition to a possible hormonal imbalance, various medications can cause UFH to appear. Sometimes, the cause remains unknown.



Q

4. I am so embarrassed by my facial hair, what can I do?

are willing to dedicate to effectively manage it.

A

While there are no permanent solutions for UFH and generally it isn't preventable, there are many treatment options that can considerably improve the condition. Read more about "What are the Approaches to Dealing with UFH" (pg. 11) in this booklet as well as speak to your healthcare professional about your options.



Q

6. What happens if I discontinue my treatment?

A

Depending on your type of treatment, if you discontinue the treatment, the UFH may eventually return to pretreatment levels. Every person, however, is unique, so your experience will be personal to you.

Q

5. What is the best treatment available?

A

There is no one best treatment available for managing your UFH. The treatment or combination of treatments you decide upon really depends on you, the severity of your UFH and the time commitment and resources you

Q

7. How do I know if my treatment is working?

A

The best indication of treatment efficacy is how you feel about the results. Every person will respond to treatments differently. If you have questions about the results you are seeing, speak with your physician. Remember to do your part, and carefully follow the treatment plan provided by your healthcare professional.



Glossary

Hair Follicles

A skin organ that produces hair. Attached to the follicle is a sebaceous gland. This is a tiny sebum-producing gland found everywhere except on the palms, lips and soles of the feet. The thicker the density of the hair, the more the number of sebaceous glands that are found.



Facial Hirsutism

A condition characterized by the presence of excess terminal (coarse) hairs on the face of females in a pattern typically seen in adult males.

changes during menopause that cause a reduction in estrogen in the body. Facial hair growth may be particularly evident in women who are not taking an oral form of hormone replacement.

Idiopathic

A common cause of UHF, it is present in up to 15 per cent of women who have UFH and who have no evidence of elevated androgen levels. The androgen excess will be found only locally around the hair follicle.

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)

A common cause of UFH, it is a syndrome of symptoms and signs of ovarian dysfunction with the cardinal features of hyperandrogenism and polycystic ovarian morphology. PCOS affects between 3 per cent and 15 per cent of women irrespective of their ethnic background. 70 per cent and 80 per cent of women with PCOS have hirsutism.

Menopause

A common cause of UFH. Some women may experience a worsening of their UFH after menopause because of the hormonal



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