

## FASHIONISTA

### WHAT WOMEN OF COLOR SHOULD KNOW ABOUT LASER HAIR REMOVAL, FROM SOMEONE WHO'S TRIED IT

After years of struggling to accept my unwanted facial hair, I decided to do something about it.

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Thick facial hair is common amongst the women in my family. As a child, I'd watch my mom shave the stubble across her cheeks and chin every couple of days. Observing her slather shaving cream all over her face and remove every bit of hair that had come in recently was simultaneously fascinating and anxiety-inducing. Knowing what I did about genetics, it was clear to me early on in life that I, too, would eventually grow facial hair at one point or another.

"I thought I had more time before this happened," I said (yes, literally out loud) in frustration to my 21-year-old self, as I stared in horror at the four or five strands of hair along my chin that had seemingly sprouted overnight. No matter how much I reassured myself it was totally normal for some women to grow facial hair, the sight of it mortified me. In my eyes, I was turning into a freakish caricature of myself, one that ought to remain inside lest someone find out about my shameful secret: my facial hair.

While facial hair in women can sometimes be a sign of a bigger medical issue like Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, a hormonal disorder which (according to the [Mayo Clinic](#)) can trigger excessive hair growth in women due to high levels of the male hormone androgen, my case was purely genetic, I discovered after getting my hormone levels checked. Knowing that, I tried embracing it, as more and more hairs would sprout up every few weeks. I event went weeks

between shaving sessions. It was all a part of my master plan to bolster my self-confidence and shift my perspective on being a hairy woman. If countless women on social could learn to accept themselves as they are, why couldn't I?

One of the defining qualities of self-image, though, is that it differs from person to person. What one person finds attractive or empowering, another might abhor. As much as I tried to come to terms that I was slowly but surely growing a beard akin to my mother's, I hoped and wished for my body to stop proI ultimately made the personal choice to get laser hair removal. Shaving every few days wasn't sustainable and waxing was far too painful and also required constant upkeep. Whereas, with laser hair removal — as I discovered through countless hours scouring the web — the treatment required one or two touch-ups a year after the initial rounds.

In theory, everything sounded perfect. Simply undergo a couple of in-office laser sessions so I could end up (mostly) hairless? My impatient self wanted to sign up immediately. But then I realized that wasn't exactly an option for me.

As someone with medium-brown skin, it would be a disaster if I got laser hair removal from anyone other than a specialist with experience working with people with my complexion or darker or weren't equipped with the right tools for my skin tone. And by disaster, I mean the treatment either (at "best") wouldn't yield any results, or (at worst) in the most severe cases, could cause "blistering, scarring and irregular skin color — [and] unfortunately, some of this can be permanent," according to board-certified, San Francisco-based dermatologist, [Dr. William Kwan](#). Talk about a nightmare. "The biggest mistake darker skin-tone patients make when considering hair removal is not doing enough research and vetting of the facility they are going to. You need to make sure the facility and provider have the appropriate training and credentials to do a safe treatment, but also interview them about how many ethnic patients they've seen and treated," advises Dr. Kwan.

When an email from a publicist entered my inbox about trying out LaserAway, one company that offers the treatment, I was initially *very* skeptical. A medical spa with 40 locations nationwide that's best known for laser hair and tattoo removal services, it gained mainstream popularity in 2010, when Kim and Khloé Kardashian [visited one of its California locations](#) on an episode of "Keeping Up With The Kardashians".

Seeing as I was serious about getting laser hair removal, I began researching the tools LaserAway uses, and was pleasantly surprised to learn that for patients with darker skin tones, the facility uses the brand Cynosure Apogee Elite — and the wavelength Nd:YAG, specifically — which is highly recommended by Dr. Kwan and other dermatologists I'd spoken to. "The Cynosure Apogee Elite [is] a dual-wavelength laser, so it has the capability of using one wavelength for our lighter skin types and a separated wavelength for our darker skin types," Morgan Wolf, a nurse practitioner at LaserAway, explains.

Relieved that I would be in good hands, I went ahead and scheduled my first appointment. As with all other kinds of laser treatments, it's advised that you only shave the treatment area 24 hours prior (no tweezing or waxing) and stay away from tanning beds or self-tanners. During my first visit, the nurse on-site administering the laser that day prepped my face with a makeup remover wipe to get rid of anything lingering on my skin's surface. Then came an important safety precaution: a spot test. "We do test pulses off to the side of the face just to double-check that everything looks good and that the energy is coming out properly — and then we watch the effect on the hair," says Wolf.

When lasers first rose to popularity, the original devices often had difficulty distinguish between one's hair follicles and the surrounding skin if the patient was dark-complexed. But in the years since the early aughts, the technology has advanced tremendously. "We can actually adjust the parameters so that the laser just hits the melanin, which is generally darker in the hair follicle, and preserve that surrounding healthy skin tissue," explains Wolf.

Fast forward three sessions later, I've had nothing but great results thus far.

Since the beginning of this journey, I was told I'd require about seven to eight treatments in order to see a significant difference. "On average, each person, regardless of skin type, [sees] about a 10 to 15 percent reduction [in hair growth] with each treatment. Typically, if you're adding those up, the ideal outcome would be 70 to 90 percent reduction from when you started your treatments," says Wolf.

While I still have a long way to go before I'm completely finished with my specific laser hair removal plan, I've already noticed a tremendous difference. Not only does my facial hair grow back more slowly than it ever did in the past, but it's also thinner and less noticeable. All in all, I'm confident that it was the right decision for me. So yes, if you're a woman of color, you *can* have a successful, safe experience with laser hair removal. Just be sure to use caution and do some thorough investigation before you choose your treatment provider.

<https://fashionista.com/2018/06/laser-hair-removal-brown-dark-skin>