



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Hirsutism is increased growth of hair on the face and body that occurs in women. It usually occurs gradually over an extended period of time. It may begin with puberty. Hirsutism is a benign condition and is mostly a cosmetic problem. When it occurs along with signs of masculinity (maleness), a more serious disorder may be involved.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Excessive growth of thick, dark hair in body areas of women where hair growth is normally absent or minimal. It grows in a male pattern (beard, moustache, chest, around the nipples, genitals, and other places).
- Hair growth may occur along with irregular or absent menstrual periods, acne, deepening of the voice, and infertility problems.

CAUSES

It may be due to genetic (hereditary) factors, hormonal dysfunction, certain drugs, and some medical disorders. In some cases, no cause is found.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Family history of hirsutism.
- Dark-haired persons, especially those of Hispanic, African-American, Mediterranean, or Indian ancestry.
- Use of drugs such as testosterone, steroids, and others.
- Adrenal disorders.
- Adrenal or ovarian tumor.
- Polycystic ovarian syndrome.
- Anorexia, acromegaly, hypothyroidism, or porphyria.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

There are no specific preventive measures.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Diagnosis and treatment of the cause can often halt further hair growth. Treatment may take 6 to 12 months. Excess hair may be removed by various methods.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Poor self-image. May feel unattractive, stressed, anxious, and find social activities with other people difficult.
- Complications may occur from underlying disorder.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam. A variety of medical tests may be done to help diagnose any disorder that could be the cause of the hair growth.

- The treatment depends on the cause of the hirsutism. A mild case of hirsutism with no menstrual problems may not require treatment. For others, treatment sometimes depends on the patient's desire for pregnancy.
- Treatment may involve drugs, surgery, and hair removal techniques.
- Tumors may be treated with surgery.
- Cosmetic treatments of hirsutism include covering up with makeup, bleaching, and removal with physical methods. These include rubbing, cutting, shaving, plucking, or waxing. Chemical depilatories are designed to use on specific body locations. Home hair-removal devices are available. All of these methods are temporary; their effects lasting from hours to days.
- Permanent hair removal may be done with electrolysis or thermolysis. These use an electric current to remove hair. Multiple treatments are needed. It is time-consuming, can be costly, and cause some discomfort.
- Permanent hair removal may be done with a laser. Larger areas can be treated quickly and with minimal discomfort. Multiple treatments are needed. It is costly.
- Newer forms of hair removal include pulsed light and photodynamic (use of a topical drug and special light).
- The various forms of hair removal can cause skin irritation, folliculitis (inflamed hair follicles), skin color changes, and, rarely, scarring.

MEDICATION

- There are a variety of drugs used to treat the underlying cause of hirsutism. They may take 3 to 6 months for results. They can help decrease new hair growth. They will not change the amount of hair you already have.
- Eflornithine (Vaniqa), a topical drug, may be prescribed for reducing facial hair.
- If skin gets irritated, use nonprescription 1% hydrocortisone cream.
- If a drug is causing hirsutism, it is usually stopped.

ACTIVITY

Usually no limits.

DIET

No special diet. If overweight, losing weight may help.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of hirsutism.
- Hair growth continues despite treatment.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page