

INGROWN HAIR

WHAT IT IS

Ingrown hair is hair that grows into the skin instead of outward. Hair removal methods such as shaving, waxing, or tweezing can cause ingrown hairs, often producing itchy, painful red bumps similar to pimples. These are sometimes pus-filled. Sites can eventually become infected, show skin colour change or scarring from scratching and picking.

RISK FACTORS

Ingrown hair tends to happen in areas where you remove hair, such as the face, neck, armpits, legs, groin, and pubic areas.

Having tightly curled hair increases the chance of ingrown hairs because the curved hair follicle may orient hair to grow sideways, in the direction of the skin. People with coarse, curly, kinky, or afro-textured hair have a higher tendency to develop ingrown hairs. This particularly affects people with skin of colour.

Hair removal methods may also play a role in the formation of ingrown hair.

- **Shaving** typically cuts hair at an angle, which may lead the hair to curve into the skin.
- **Waxing** pulls hair out by the root. When hair re-grows, it can grow to the side and into the skin, rather than straight outwards past the skin's surface.



If you notice signs of possible infection, contact your doctor or Certified Dermatologist.

Ingrown Hair



The normal state of the hair



Hair has grown back on itself and back into the skin surface



Hair has blocked from growing out and started to grow to the side



Hair is trapped on its way out of the skin

TREATMENT

The simplest solution is to not remove hair, but that is not acceptable for many people. Adopting simpler hair reduction practices such as trimming hairs close to the skin surface with cuticle scissors, and reducing how often you shave and perform other hair removal methods can help reduce the chance of developing ingrown hair. You may also consider alternative hair removal techniques such as electrolysis or laser hair removal.

Some shaving techniques that may reduce the risk of developing ingrown hair include:

- Shaving in the direction of the hair follicle, not against the hair
- Using a sharp and ideally new razor blade each time you shave
- Using short strokes
- Avoid pulling skin taut while shaving since the hair ends retract under the skin, increasing the chance that they will grow sideways or into the skin
- Exfoliating prior to, or in between, shaving sessions with alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs) or glycolic acid can keep the skin smooth and decrease the tendency to form ingrown hairs
- Switching from a blade razor to an electric shaver

Your doctor may also prescribe various medications that can help control ingrown hair.

A **retinoid** cream can be used to promote exfoliation and enhance skin turnover. It can also treat dark spots and thickened skin caused by ingrown hairs. This prescription treatment is generally used sparingly at night to affected areas.

A **topical steroid** cream can help to reduce inflammation, redness and swelling. It is available over-the-counter in a low strength concentration, or your doctor may prescribe a higher strength concentration with specific instructions for use.

Antibiotics may be required to treat an infected ingrown hair. A topical antibiotic can be used on the affected area, or an oral antibiotic may be needed for a more severe infection.

