

# How to Tell if Laser Hair Removal Will Work on You



Emma Sarran Webster  
AUG 10, 2017 8:00AM EDT



Few people, if any, actually *enjoy* the process of shaving, right? Even if you're doing it **like a pro**, it can still feel like a tedious or annoying step in your morning (or evening) routine, especially if it's an area you want to keep constantly hair-free. Which is why **laser hair removal** can be an awesome alternative. (Disclaimer: All of this only applies if you choose to remove your body hair, of course — and that decision is completely up to you.)

"Laser hair removal is a process that targets the hair follicle and pigment," cosmetic dermatologist **Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank**, tells *Teen Vogue*. "The wavelength of the light from the laser goes deep enough into the skin to destroy the hair follicle. Repeated pulses from the laser first eliminate existing hair, and then allow the laser's heat to penetrate the skin and direct energy into the hair follicles, preventing future growth."

Translation? If you don't mind a **bit of pain**, going through this process can mean you'll never have to shave the area you treat again (or at least, very rarely).

But does it *really* work? Well, that depends on a few factors. Before you book your appointment, find out if you're a candidate.

### **It works on most skin types.**

It used to be the case that laser hair removal really only worked on people with dark hair and fair skin because the laser works by targeting pigment] (like that in dark hair), and with dark skin, it may have aimed for the skin itself, potentially causing burns and pigmentation (or darkened skin). But now, that's not the case, thanks to new technologies that expand the breadth of laser hair removal possibilities. "Laser hair removal works on all skin tones and complexions, as long as the center uses the right lasers," Christian Karavolas, owner of **Romeo & Juliette Laser Hair Removal Spa**, tells *Teen Vogue*. "For darker skin, one needs a wavelength that bypasses the epidermis and gets rid of the hair in the root."

That said, even the latest and greatest technologies don't mean it's perfect. So if you *do* have a darker skin tone, be sure to consult with your doctor before moving forward; and minimize tanning before your session. "Self tanners are a not recommended at least two weeks before treatment," Christian says, to avoid chances (even if they're minimal) of the laser targeting the skin pigment. "Tanning is okay, however if the person is sun baked, then we suggest that they stay out of the sun for 3-to-4 weeks prior to treatment. They would need to be treated with lasers for tanned skin."

### **But not on all hair colors or types.**

Because lasers are attracted to pigment, they work best on hair that's brunette or darker. "Laser currently does not work on hair that has no pigment, i.e. light blonde, light red, and white hair," Christian says.

And it's also ideal if your hair is coarse. "If hair is very fine, it will not pick up the laser well," Dr. Frank says. Though all of that could change in the future: Christian says Romeo & Juliette is currently helping with research on lasers that'll work on less pigmented hair. And Dr. Frank notes that a new technology called LightSheer Desire can be used on all hair types and colors (except for grey), though people with light blonde or red locks "should have low expectations."

### **It won't really work if you've recently waxed or tweezed.**

But you *can* shave before right before your session. In fact, you should: "To get the best results, shave before getting laser hair removal, so you can target the hair follicle," Dr. Frank says. "Waxing or tweezing removes the hair follicle and then we are unable to target it completely. If you have to wax, do it at least a week before, so the hair follicle has time to grow back."

## **Different patients may need different numbers of sessions.**

Laser hair removal isn't a one-and-done process: Patients will need to return for multiple sessions over time (spaced out by several weeks) in order to see permanent results. "Hair grows in different stages," Christian says. "On average, depending on body part, approximately 40% of the hairs are in the growth stage. As we do one treatment, all the hairs go, but the hairs that are not in the growth stage will start to come out. It is for this reason that multiple treatments are needed."

But how many treatments, exactly, you'll need depends on your body. "Everyone's hair grows at different rates, so some may need more sessions than others," Dr. Frank says. "If your hair grows faster, you will need more sessions than someone with slower hair growth."

And your hormones could affect how well the whole process works, too. Christian says people with hormonal conditions like Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) may need more treatment than the average patient. And then there's the fact that your hormones (and hair growth) change over time. "As we get older, we get hairier and our bodies change," Dr. Frank says. "The goal is to get anywhere between 80% and 90% [total hair removal]." But, he says, it's possible that you could have new hair growth after you've completed all of your sessions; in which case you could go back for "touch-ups."

## **If you're not sure, consult your doctor before attempting a full session.**

Even with the new technologies, laser hair removal isn't a perfect science, and everyone's body is different. So, it's always a good idea to schedule a consultation to get your questions answered. Christian even says the center should be able to do a test patch on your body somewhere (perhaps somewhere not too visible!) and "immediately be able to tell you whether laser will work on you or not."