

Shave that beard! – Skin care before and after shavings

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There are many ways to get rid of unwanted hair on various parts of the body. How does the skin react to the different techniques? What can be done to avoid or soothe irritations?

Already in ancient times people used to remove their body hair. Nowadays as hygiene plays a significant part in our lives, hairless skin still is in vogue – with women but also with men. People of different cultures and religions as e.g. the Islam perceive underarm and pubic hairs as impure. Only the male beard, well-trimmed and groomed, is excluded from the ideal of beauty of a hair-free body. Apart from that, also the so-called stronger sex is convinced that the stubbles need to come off.

Hair removal methods are epilation or depilation and the different techniques are e.g. waxing, sugaring, manual plucking, epilators or IPL- and laser devices. Chemical hair removal works with creams which may contain thioglycolic acid for instance. The acid breaks the peptide bridges of the hair structure. By far the most common method is shaving, either with the razor, wet shaving devices or the electric dry razor.

A question of acceptance

Dry shaving certainly is the simplest shaving method. Most of the men however reject this technique because the skin does not feel as smooth as after a wet shaving. Dry shavings require minimal preparation; either the dry razor is directly used or the skin is rinsed with cold water and dried before shaving. Alternatively alcohol-containing pre-shaves can be applied which are enhanced with lubricants. In sensorial aspect, it comes closer to a wet shaving.

Shaving soaps & gels

Wet shavings still require shaving creams respectively shaving soaps that are frothed with water or also finished foams out of cans. They mostly consist of the potassium or sodium soaps of long-chained fatty acids and moreover contain skin soothing and smoothing oils. Also gels with a light fattening characteristic are used before and after the shaving. Gels

are advantageous insofar as they can be universally enriched with additives:

- Algae extract, allantoin, aloe vera and chamomile extract for instance soothe the skin.
- Bisabolol (active agent of chamomile), salicylic acid, berberine, boswellia (frankincense resin) inhibit inflammations.
- Vegetable oils such as the oils of linseed, kiwi seed and evening primrose excel by their particularly high content of essential fatty acids. Aqueous nanodispersions of the oils are easy to process, have anti-inflammatory effects and are not greasy on the skin.
- Tannins, extracts of witch hazel, horsetail and tea as well as aluminium salts (aluminum chloride) have astringent effects and can reliably close micro lesions.
- The vitamins B, E or pre-stages of vitamins such as D-panthenol accelerate recovery processes.

Besides water, the gel bases consist of highly molecular substances such as xanthan, alginic acid and CM-glucan (polysaccharide) and hyaluronic acid. They hydrate the skin – in contrast to film-forming substances such as carbomers (acrylates) and their salts. A pre-treatment before wet shaving smoothes the skin and avoids injuries caused by the sharp blades. Micro lesions cannot be completely excluded though.

The after-treatment with astringent substances avoids bleedings while soothing and anti-inflammatory components quickly get irritations under control. D-panthenol accelerates the recovery by improving the cell proliferation.

Aftershaves

Popular are disinfecting aftershaves with high alcohol content and possibly fragrant essential oils. In the case of sensitive skin however caution is recommended as highly concentrated alcohol may have counterproductive effects

when applied over a longer period of time. The essential oils may contain allergenic components. In the case that the skin barrier already is irritated by the previously used shaving soap and becomes permeable, alcohol denat (INCI) neither is an appropriate aftershave component since it contains plasticizers such as diethyl phthalate (phthalic acid diethyl ester). Barrier creams with natural components of the skin are the better alternative for sensitive skin. After the shaving, underarm, pubic and buttock areas frequently are irritated since the cushioning feature of the hairs is missing and the skin to skin friction accordingly is increased. Occlusive situations are bound to occur. Sweat and skin fats are not adequately eliminated. Irritations are pre-programmed in the case of tightly fitting clothing. In this specific instance antiseptic powders and light clothing are beneficial.

Popular also is the depilation on thighs respectively the bikini area. This also can happen involuntarily as for instance if persons are hospitalized for abdominal surgery and the surrounding hairs have to be removed. Particular caution is recommended in these cases since consecutive infections on the insides of the thighs triggered by bacteria and fungi are a common symptom.

It is recommended to apply antiseptic aqueous solutions containing polyhexanide (PHMB) or octenidine before and after the shaving. Low dosed pharmaceutical aluminium chloride or aluminium sulfate (alum) solutions can also be beneficial since they denaturize the proteins of the microorganisms and close micro lesions, as already described above. Solutions with high proof alcohol or isopropyl alcohol are less appropriate.

Perspiration

As already mentioned, perspiration after the shaving can become a problem. If there are no hairs in the armpits or in the pubic area, the skin already feels relatively moist under normal conditions while remaining hairs transmit a dry sensation. Sweat evaporation inevitably slows down due to the considerably smaller surface. Consequently, a deodorant needs to be applied much earlier so as to avoid sweat stains on T-shirts and blouses. In this respect, mild creamy products should be preferred in order to prevent irritations on the possibly neighbouring mucous membranes. Hence, besides antiperspirant and antiseptic active agents, also barrier active components are required in deodorant products. Appropriate are non-irritating preparations without emulsifiers.

In the case of problem skin

Things could become difficult if the areas to be shaved and particularly the facial and neck areas show cornification disorders such as acne whereby the sebum glands are affected. In these cases an accompanying anti-comedogenic treatment is required.

Lotions or modular systems containing essential fatty acids such as linoleic acid, alpha and gamma linolenic acid in liposomal or nanodisperse form have proved to be efficient with consistent application. It is recommended using the products in the evening. This also applies for vitamin A containing products since the sensitive ingredients become less active when they are exposed to sunlight. By contrast, lotions containing frankincense resin (anti-irritant) and azelaic acid (antimicrobial) can also be applied during the day.

In this particular case, fatty skin care creams are not needed after the shaving as they would do more harm than good. The sebum glands usually produce enough lipids. The same active agents can be used on the skin prone to perioral dermatitis or rosacea. The most effective instruments though are pure sera without lipid substances or additives. Skin care creams should be sparsely used as the topical fatty films facilitate the growth of anaerobic bacteria.

Uncomplicated areas

Although breast, back, legs and arm shavings take their time due to the large areas to be done, they are rather uncomplicated regarding the provisions before and the care after the shavings. The reason is that the skin in these areas is far more resilient. In a general sense though, the same considerations apply as for the more sensitive areas of the skin.

After hot wax or sugar epilations the same aspects apply as after shavings. Depending on the skin type or the particular skin areas also appropriate lotions with water- or gel-like consistency can be used. Occlusive conditions that cause redundant swellings of the skin should also be avoided in these cases.

Watch out: bacteria!

Beyond that, it is recommended to stay away from potential sources of infection such as public baths or similar institutions, at least for one day. Since hairs provide a certain protection against sun radiation, extended sun exposure should also be avoided after an extensive hair removal.

The IPL based epilation stimulates the melanin formation. Potential eye-catching spots related to such treatments can be almost excluded by

applying liposomal sera with Sodium Ascorbyl Phosphate (INCI) or the appropriate vegetable extracts; an addition of D-panthenol complements the pre- and after-treatment.

The epilation creams based on thioglycolic acid for the chemical epilation have a high pH value. That is why they should be used with reasonable care. After application, the skin

areas should be thoroughly rinsed with lukewarm water and then be treated with barrier creams without mineral oil components and emulsifiers in order to adequately nourish the skin.

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