

## **Hirsutism**

A male pattern body hair growth in a female is defined as hirsutism.

### **(1) What are the symptoms of hirsutism?**

There is a growth of coarse hair in upper lip, chin and front of the chest (as a male). In addition, thighs and buttocks can also get involved.

### **(2) What are the causes of hirsutism?**

- The main reason for hirsutism is excessive production of androgen hormone or increased sensitivity of the body to androgen hormone. (Androgen hormone is produced in ovaries and adrenal glands)
- However, 25% of females with hirsutism doesn't have an identified specific reason. (With advancing age, females tend to increase their growth of hair in face and limbs. This condition can be specially see following menopause.)
- The commonest cause of hirsutism among females of reproductive age is Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome.
- In addition, certain medications (Steroids), excessive secretion of other hormones of the body can result in hirsutism. In extremely rare instances, an abnormal growth in the tissues that secrete hormones, can result in hirsutism.
- There are some instances where you should seek immediate medical advice, if you develop symptoms of hirsutism.  
These instances include;
  - 1) Hirsutism occurring before the onset of puberty
  - 2) Changes in the menstrual cycle
  - 3) Obesity and newly diagnosed diabetes mellitus
  - 4) Hair thinning, balding, coarsening and deepening of the voice

### **(3) What are the available treatments for hirsutism?**

- At first, cause of hirsutism should be identified and treated.
- Hormone tests and ultrasound scan of abdomen are the basic tests that are performed.
- Specialist advice from an Endocrinologist should be taken, if the results of hormone tests become abnormal.
- In addition to pharmacological treatment options, other methods of removal of excessive hair are available.



## 1) Body hair removal therapies that can be performed by the patient

### i. Shaving

Excessive hair can be removed with a razor. A common myth in the society is that removal of hair using a razor predisposing to exaggerated new hair growth. However, frequent shaving may predispose to skin allergies.

### ii. Waxing

Wax can be used to remove excessive hair easily. But, it can't be used to remove excessive facial hair. Side effects of waxing includes; infection of hair follicles and scarring.

### iii. Depilatory creams

Before using depilatory agents to remove excessive hair, it is mandatory to check the suitability of the depilatory agent for your skin type, using a patch test. Skin allergy is a rare side effect of this treatment option.

### iv. Bleaching agents

Dark-colored hair can be converted to light-colored hair, by using bleaching agents. However, this is not a suitable method of treatment for patients with dark or tan color skin.

## 2) Body hair removal therapies that can be performed by a doctor

### I. Electrolysis (electrical hair removal)

Destruction of the hair follicle can be done by injecting a beam of electric current with a very fine needle, into the hair root, is known as electrolysis. The hair follicle can be permanently destroyed using this technique. There is a risk of scarring due to electrolysis. Electrolysis should only be performed by a qualified doctor.

### II. Laser therapy

Laser therapy will completely destroy the hair follicle. Laser therapy should be repeated in multiple sessions. It is a procedure with less side effects. (redness, discoloration and scarring of skin are rare side effects)

Sun exposure should be avoided during the course of laser therapy. Other methods of hair removal should also be avoided during laser therapy.



### 3) Pharmacological therapy

- **Anti-androgens**

This will reduce synthesis of androgen hormone or reduce that activity of it. It will take several weeks to get a favorable response. Retardation of hair growth will occur following cessation of treatment.

- **Oral contraceptives**

Hirsutism can also be treated with Contraceptive Pills, that have been used for inhibition of the action of androgen hormones. Side effects include; breast pain, nausea, headache and post-menopausal bleeding.

- **Cyproterone**

This will inhibit the action of the androgen hormone. (This can be taken along with Contraceptive Pills)  
Side effects include; weight gain, depression, increased susceptibility for clotting and decreased libido.

- **Spironolactone**

Spironolactone in appropriate dosage, can control hirsutism. Side effects include; excessive passage of urine, breast pain, irregularities of menstrual cycle and alterations of liver function.

- **Finasteride**

Finasteride can only be used in post-menopausal women. This will inhibit the synthesis of androgen hormone.

Anti-androgen containing medications must be avoided during pregnancy. Birth control methods must be adopted for females in the reproductive age, prior to the initiation of anti-androgen containing medications.

