

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LOVE CURLY HAIR ... EVERYWHERE

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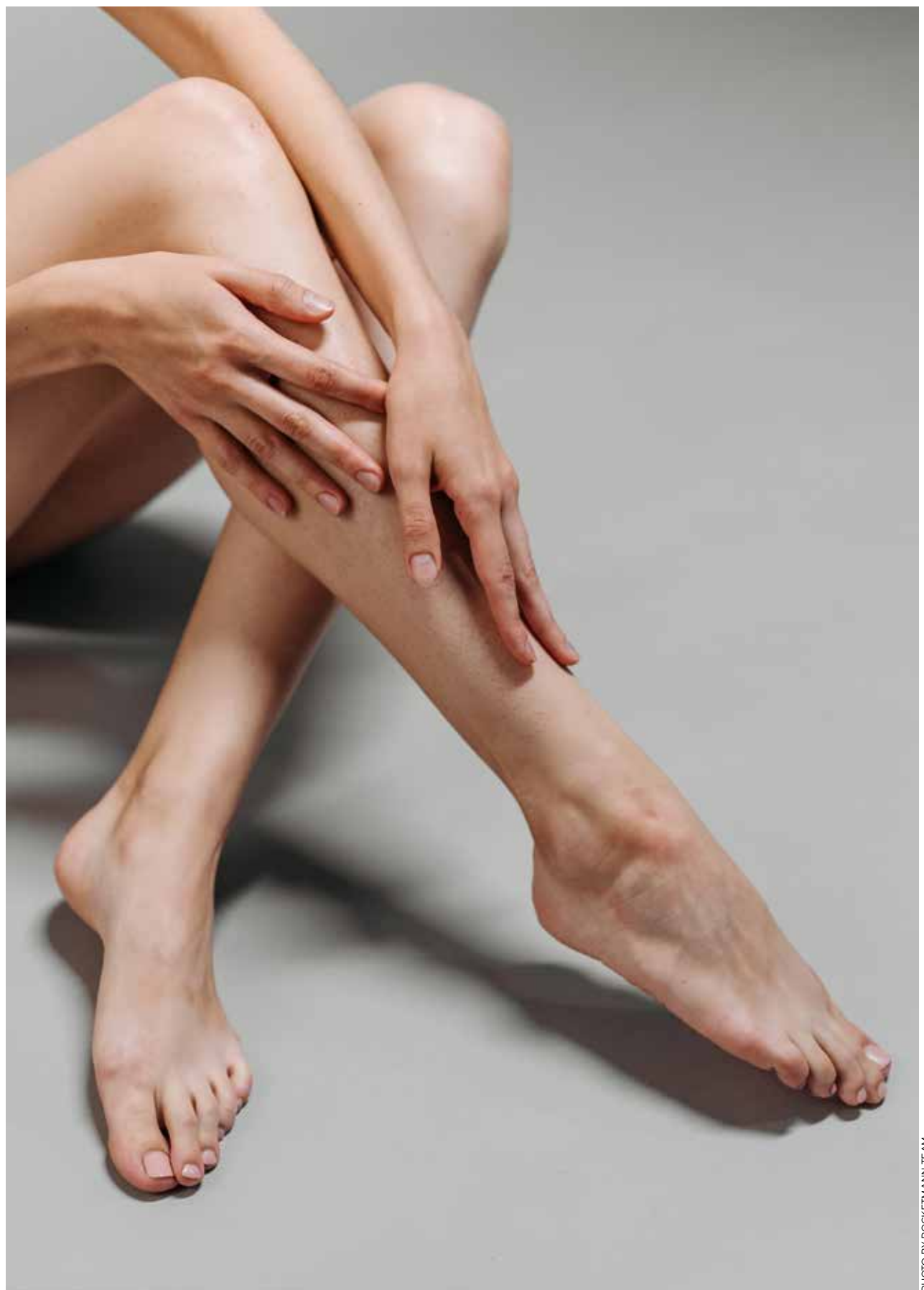


PHOTO BY ROCKETMANN TEAM

It's possible to love your curls without wanting to wear them from head to toe — which is to say, there's no shame in trimming, tweezing, waxing, or otherwise removing unwanted hair from anywhere on your body. And that's true for everyone ... but for curly humans in particular, hair removal might be even more appealing.

That's because your hair shape starts way down in the follicle. Curls have to pass through oval-shaped follicles, as opposed to the circular shape that allows straight hair to slide through smoothly without a single kink. The narrow, oval passage puts tension on the hair as it's starting to emerge. Though oversimplified, it might help to think of the way ribbons turn into curls once they encounter the tension of a scissor blade.

This not only creates beautiful waves, ringlets, and curls...it also creates a prime environment for ingrown hairs and associated skin issues, like acne from follicle blockages or buildup. Individuals might experience this more in certain areas, like the bikini line or underarms. This is one reason people go out of their way to remove unwanted hair there.

Whatever your reasons might be, if you're looking for a permanent option that will give you the perfect in-between of lush curls on your crown with bare skin elsewhere, it happens to be a great time of year to learn about, and potentially begin, laser hair removal.

Who's a good candidate for laser hair removal?

The main reason that people get laser hair removal is that they're looking for a permanent fix. Shaving, tweezing, and waxing are time-consuming practices with price tags attached — and no matter how ideal the results, it's always temporary. Many people simply want to escape what they see as a lifelong loop.

“Almost 60% of our clients come for what we call cosmetic reasons,” says Tina Saldiran, owner of Manhattan Laser Centers in New York. “This means they have a lot of hair and, although it's somewhat manageable via shaving or waxing, the process is time-consuming and tedious and requires perpetual upkeep. For the other 40%, hair is not merely a cosmetic issue, but a quality of life or health issue. Hair can grow in places that affect our daily interactions with others (like excessive facial hair for women). Or the texture of the hair causes ingrown, and removing it is uncomfortable (for example, causes razor burn).”

But the good news is that most curlies are great candidates for laser hair removal. Informed by over two decades in laser experience, Saldiran says: “The best candidates for hair removal have always been those that have dark and thick/coarse hair, [and] curly hair



PHOTO BY ORHUN RUZGAR OZ

tends to be thick. That is a fantastic combination for laser.” Plus, she says, “Curly hair is more inclined to cause ingrown, as it tends to curl under the skin and get stuck, therefore, the relief that laser offers for this hair type is unmatched.”

“It should be mentioned that dark and coarse are subjective concepts,” Saldiran adds. “What the person considers dark hair might not be dark enough for the laser, or vice-versa.”

For this reason, she recommends starting out with a consultation. Traditionally, you should not have to pay for a consultation or what’s called a “patch test.”

“The patch test shows us three things,” says Saldiran, “the level of pain or discomfort you will experience, your skin’s reaction to laser (how long it will feel sensitive or look red), and visible results.”

She explains that people can and do get a consultation on the day they intend to begin sessions — but getting a patch test, then waiting about a week to see the results, helps assure people that the procedure will work and is worth investing in.

After that, it’s a matter of determining which areas you’ll want to cover and approximately how many sessions you might need — though much of the time, this is something to feel out once you start seeing results. You can always start small and add on.

What do you need to know before making a commitment?

The first thing to know is that laser hair removal is not a scary, invasive, or particularly painful procedure.

“I refrain from saying it’s *not* painful, because that is a very subjective issue,” says Saldiran. “People have a very wide spectrum of pain perception; in addition, the same person can experience a different level of pain for different areas on their body. That being said, currently none of our clients are using any numbing creams or painkillers; most of our clients actually come in during their lunch break to get treated and return to the office with no discomfort.”

The second thing is that people shouldn’t think of this as a frivolous procedure reserved for those with money to burn. Many years ago, there were fewer people offering these services. The machines were extremely expensive, and the procedures were priced accordingly, so only people with the means to match those prices were doing laser hair removal treatments.

Today, however, there’s an increased demand, and the cost to produce laser treatment machines has reduced significantly — meaning there are more in circulation, and everything associated with them costs a lot less than it used to. You might be surprised to learn how many spas and medical offices are now offering laser

HAIR REMOVAL’S NEW ERA

At Manhattan Laser Center, a large portion of the clientele are men. This is, in part, because women start finding hair removal solutions at an early age, and they tend to normalize whatever routines they’re first introduced to by their caretakers.

“Mothers pass down whatever method they have been taught themselves,” Saldiran explains. “I, for example, grew up in Turkey. Over there, women of my mother’s generation exclusively waxed with concoctions they brewed at home. I never heard of women shaving until I came to the United States.” Her mother told her that she should never shave, unless she wanted her hair to grow back more, “which I learned much later in life was untrue.”

Men, however, “come into this information from the outside, often without guidance and without pre-established norms,” Saldiran says. “Interestingly enough, in recent years a good number of my male clients have sent me their sons for treatment. This not only shows that laser is being normalized, but also that men are guiding their sons through an issue that, in my generation, would probably never be talked about between father and son.”

She thinks, and hopes, that perceptions will continue to shift, for the sake of providing future generations with a complete set of information, a full range of options, and the cultural acceptance to choose those that make the most sense for each individual.

hair removal — or by how many people around you have already started using this option alongside their regular massages, manicures, and salon appointments.

“I would not define laser as fancy, but pragmatic,” says Saldiran. “When compared to other methods, like waxing, the price is actually lower, because waxing requires an infinite number of treatments — whereas most areas can be effectively reduced by 90% or more with 8-10 treatments, with laser.”

But if cost *is* a concern, start with the area that’s important to you, advises Saldiran. “You don’t have to save a lot of money to do full-body laser,” she stresses. “You can start with the bikini or the face or the underarms, if those areas really bother you, and finish them, and move on to others. This will make the treatments not only shorter and easier to accommodate, but also more affordable.”

Timing might also be something to keep in mind. Appointments take place every 4-6 weeks, and you'll need an average of eight appointments. Once you know these variables, it can help you figure out the optimal time to get started.

Starting in the fall is a popular choice (giving you results by swimsuit season), while summer is the least practical. "Summer is a tricky season for laser, because it requires no extensive sun/heat exposure right before and right after a treatment," says Saldiran. "For many people, this poses no problem, as they typically work indoors or don't like to be at the beach/pool all summer."

Finally, you should know that age matters. "Younger people typically have not reached their hair production zenith — meaning their bodies are still actively producing hair, and usually in higher quantities than older people," says Saldiran. "The machine will still remove what they currently have, but they might need more treatments on average than others to remove that incoming, new hair that might develop yet over time. For older people, the challenge is graying hair: Once hair turns gray, there aren't any effective lasers to kill the follicle."

But as to whether or not there's a perfect age to start? Saldiran can't say. "I have found this to be a very personal decision," she admits. "There are a lot of people who are dealing with excessive or problematic hair early on, and I would argue [against] waiting for an 'ideal age' — where new hair production tends to slow down, is far too long, and causes a significant loss of quality of life. I think it is wiser to start laser and remove 90% of the hair at an early age, then resume annual or semiannual cleanup treatments."

For curlies who spent years struggling to embrace

AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE

As someone who's just completed a full laser hair removal package, here are a few things I'd tell my friends if they were considering it:

I did the math, and this was less expensive for me than continuing to get waxes every two months, buy razor blades and lotions, and spend the time tweezing, shaving, and grooming. I personally love an evidence-based decision, so it was a no-brainer.

Some spots "tingle" more than others — I think how it feels will really depend on the individual and their own sensitivities. (My sister felt *nothing* in one of my top "tingle" spots, with the same laser, so you just don't know!) If you're already getting waxes, or if you have tattoos, I think you'll find it comfortable by comparison.

I undressed during sessions (lying down with a

HOW TO CHOOSE A LASER HAIR SPECIALIST

"The best practitioner is the one that has both the Alexandrite and the NdYAG laser," says Saldiran. "Having both machines means that the clinic can treat you throughout the year."

The specialist should also be an easy commute for you, "sort of like a gym," she adds, because you are likelier to go to your sessions if it's not too far out of your way.

Because most practices offer free consultations *with* patch tests, you should be wary of those that charge for either part — especially if it seems like an exorbitant fee.

It also helps to make sure you feel comfortable with the practitioner and facilities. For example, if they seem to be trying to upsell you — adding to the number of sessions you want to buy, or pressuring you to expand the hair removal coverage area — then it might be a sign to try someone else. Cleanliness, respect, and communication are also essential.

their hair in the first place, the decision to start removing it might be especially fraught. But it can also be freeing to get comfortable enough with your curls to feel that all decisions about how you wear them, and care for them, are available to you. Ultimately, it's a personal choice about health, comfort, and aesthetics that should help *you* live confidently in the skin you're in.

modesty towel, as you would during a massage), because I was having a lot of areas treated at once. Thankfully, I felt comfortable with my practitioners (if not chilly sometimes, since the room with the machine is kept cool). Trusting them to maneuver your limbs and give directions, and communicating in both directions about what's transpiring — while keeping the relationship respectful — is of utmost importance. Choose the right people, because they'll be your partners in working toward your goals for several months!

For me, it was a life-changing decision. I just finished my first no-shave summer: never packing a razor in my suitcase, never worrying about throwing on a skirt at the last minute, and eliminating a lot of skin problems in those treatment areas — which boosts my confidence every single day.



PHOTO BY ORHUN RÜZGAR ÖZ

Q&A WITH TINA SALDIRAN, LASER EXPERT OF 20+ YEARS

Is laser hair removal permanent?

Yes. The hair that we kill is dead and gone and will never regrow. However, I would stress that it is permanent for the kind of hair that laser is effective against: dark and coarse hair. Laser will not work on very fine, peach-fuzz kind of hair, or lighter colors like blonde, gray, and red. It should also be noted that it will work strictly on the hair you have *today*; there are certain areas in the human body that will perpetually see hair growth, even if it slows down considerably over time: the upper back and shoulders for men, the bikini area for women, and the face and head for both men and women. These may require annual or semiannual cleanup sessions to keep in check.

Does skin color or complexion matter?

There are (basically) two kinds of laser: One treats

fair-to-medium skin (Alexandrite) and one treats medium-to-dark skin (NdYAG). Different companies make different lasers (and certain models accommodate both wavelengths in a single model), but each will fall into one of these two categories. We recommend that you go to a clinic that has both machines.

Does laser affect acne, ingrown hairs, discoloration?

"Laser definitely works on ingrowns! The machine evaporates the hair that is stuck under the skin and the body absorbs it. Once the problem is removed, the skin immediately starts to smooth and heal. Over the years, we have noticed that our machines have a modest effect on discoloration; they will help, but since this is not what their main task is, the results will be minimal. There are lasers that deal with acne specifically, but hair removal lasers are not effective against acne. If the [issue] has nothing to do with hair, our machines will not be effective against it."