

Hirsutism (Excess Hair)

- Hirsutism is excess hair growth on the parts of the body that are dependent on the activity of male hormones (androgens).
 - Chin, sideburns
 - Chest, areolas, abdomen
 - Upper/Lower back
 - Pubis, thighs
- Both men and women make androgens, of which testosterone is only one. Androgens can be produced in the ovaries/testes as well as in the adrenal glands.
- What causes hirsutism?
 - Genetics/ethnicity:
 - if your hair patterns are similar to your parents' hair patterns, this is probably a "normal" variant.
 - Mediterranean, African and Indian populations naturally produce more hair than Asian, Native American and many White populations.
 - Ovarian dysfunction:
 - Ovarian tumors that make androgens
 - Polycystic ovarian syndrome
 - Adrenal dysfunction:
 - Tumors that make androgens or cortisol
 - Non-tumor causes of excess androgens (i.e., congenital adrenal hyperplasia)
 - Pituitary gland tumors that signal excess androgen production
 - Medications (i.e., certain contraceptive pills/IUDs, steroid hormones, seizure medications, supplements, etc.)
- How do we diagnose hirsutism?
 - Examine history of plucking, shaving, waxing and gauge hair growth using the Ferriman-Gallwey score.
 - A score between 8-15 is MILD
 - Investigate puberty (early? late?) and periods (frequent? Infrequent?)
 - Labs for excess androgens
 - Possibly an ultrasound of the pelvis
- How can we treat hirsutism?
 - We always treat the underlying condition:
 - Androgen-producing tumors are surgically removed.
 - PCOS is treated with oral contraceptives that do NOT make androgens worse (i.e., Yasmin).
 - Medications that worsen androgen production will be removed if safe and appropriate.

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- If treating the underlying condition is not enough, or there IS no apparent underlying condition, we can add medications like spironolactone and tamsulosin to reduce hair growth.
- Various hair removal methods are available, and these are usually NOT covered by insurance
 - Lasers
 - Electrolysis
 - Shaving, plucking, waxing, threading

Resources

- Google image search ferriman gallwey score
- Mayo Clinic www.mayoclinic.com section on Hirsutism
- UCLA OB/GYN <http://obgyn.ucla.edu/hirsutism>

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