

Excessive Hair Growth

PCOS, Cushing's Syndrome, Obesity

FAQ

Your Questions Answered.

What is considered excessive hair growth or hirsutism?

Hirsutism is a condition in which too much hair grows on the face or body as compared to what might be average for a person's age and ethnicity. Although hirsutism can occur in both men and women, usually only women consider it a problem.

Women who have hirsutism have dark, thick hair on their face, chest, abdomen and back. This thick, dark hair is different from the hair that some women have on their upper lip, chin, breasts or stomach, or the fine "baby" or vellus hair all over their body. Women from certain ethnic groups tend to have more body hair than others. This does not mean that they have hirsutism.

What causes hirsutism?

Hirsutism can be caused by abnormally high levels of male hormones (called androgens). Other symptoms associated with a high level of male hormones include acne, irregular menstrual periods, deepening of the voice and increased muscle mass. The following are some of the conditions that may increase a woman's normally low levels of male hormones:

- Polycystic ovary syndrome
- Cushing's syndrome and Cushing's disease
- Obesity
- Tumors in the ovaries or adrenal gland, formed when abnormal cells grow out of control and clump together
- Certain medications including birth control pills, hormones and anabolic steroids
- Heredity/genetics

What is Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)?

Polycystic ovary syndrome is a health problem that can affect a woman's menstrual cycle, ability to have children, hormones, heart, blood vessels and appearance. With PCOS, women typically have:

- High levels of androgens – these are sometimes called male hormones, although females also produce them
- Missed or irregular periods
- Many small cysts in their ovaries

What causes PCOS?

The cause of PCOS is unknown, however most researchers believe that more than one factor could play a role in its development. Genes/heredity are thought to be one factor. Researchers also think insulin could be linked to PCOS. Insulin is a hormone that controls the delivery of sugar, starches and other food into the body's tissues so that it can be used for energy. Many women with PCOS have problems metabolizing insulin so that too much exists in the body. Excess insulin appears to increase production of androgens. These hormones are made in fat cells, the ovaries and the adrenal gland. Levels of androgens that are higher than normal can lead to acne, excessive hair growth, weight gain and problems with ovulation.

What are the symptoms of PCOS?

Not all women with PCOS share the same symptoms, but most experience at least one of the following:

- Infrequent menstrual periods, no menstrual periods and/or irregular bleeding
- Infertility due to lack of ovulation
- Increased hair growth on the face, chest, stomach, back, thumbs or toes
- Ovarian cysts
- Acne, oily skin or dandruff
- Weight gain or obesity, usually carrying extra weight around the waist
- Insulin resistance or type 2 diabetes
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Male-pattern baldness or thinning hair
- Patches of thickened and dark brown or black skin on the neck, arms, breasts or thighs
- Skin tags or tiny excess flaps of skin in the armpits or neck area
- Pelvic pain
- Sleep apnea—excessive snoring and times when breathing stops while asleep

What is Cushing's syndrome?

Cushing's syndrome occurs when your body makes too much cortisol. Cortisol is also sometimes called a "stress hormone" and is a natural steroid hormone that's like the "cortisone" in some medicines. Cushing's syndrome can be caused by the body producing too much cortisol or it can be caused by taking a large amount of cortisone-like drugs.

What causes Cushing's syndrome?

The most common cause of Cushing's syndrome is taking cortisone-like medicines orally (by mouth) every day for weeks to months. Prednisone is the most common medicine that's taken this way.

Inhaled steroid medicines for asthma and steroid skin creams for eczema and other skin conditions don't cause Cushing's syndrome. Even oral medicines taken every day for short periods of time or every other day for longer periods don't often cause Cushing's syndrome.

The next most common cause of Cushing's syndrome is Cushing's disease. Tumors in the adrenal glands or somewhere else in the body can also cause Cushing's syndrome.

What is Cushing's disease?

Cushing's disease is the name doctors use when Cushing's syndrome is caused by a tumor in the pituitary gland. The pituitary gland is on the bottom of the brain and controls the body's production of cortisol. These small tumors can cause the adrenal glands, which are near the kidneys, to make too much cortisol.

The tumors on the pituitary gland in Cushing's disease aren't usually cancerous. However, if these tumors get too big, they can cause problems with your eyesight.

What are the signs and symptoms of Cushing's syndrome and disease?

The following are some of the signs and symptoms of Cushing's syndrome and disease:

- Fat deposits that form around the stomach and upper back, while the arms and legs don't experience weight gain
- Thinner skin that's more prone to bruising
- Cuts, scratches and insect bites that take a long time to heal
- Pink or purple stretch marks
- Facial puffiness
- Feeling tired and weak
- Depression
- Irregular menstrual periods
- Growth of thicker, more visible body hair
- High blood pressure and high blood sugar levels
- Osteoporosis (weak and brittle bones)

How is obesity linked to hirsutism?

Obese women are more likely to be insulin-resistant (hyperinsulinemic). As previously mentioned, excess insulin appears to increase the production of androgens, putting them at a higher risk of becoming hirsute.

When should I see my doctor about hirsutism?

See your doctor if you have a sudden or persistent, long-term gradual increase in facial or body hair, if your periods have become irregular, you begin experiencing excess weight gain without a significant change in diet or exercise or if your voice has become deeper.

Can Alase™ treat the excessive hair growth caused by these conditions?

Laser and light-based hair reduction treatments are an effective and long-term solution to treat unwanted hair. However, the conditions discussed here all lead to persistent, long-term hair growth, involving the activation of new hair follicles over time. Light-based hair reduction cannot treat follicles that have not yet been activated, and as such new hair growth from these conditions would require additional and potentially ongoing treatment.

An individual dealing with any of the preceding conditions should view Alase™ treatments as a means of hair management. Even individuals who experience great results after a series of treatments may notice significant new hair growth within three, six or twelve months or more following the completion of their package. It is also possible that new follicular activation will occur at such a rapid pace that results between treatments may not appear to be as successful as hoped. As the condition persists, so will new follicular activation, and it will do so at a much faster pace than for those unaffected by hirsutism.