

# How to Get Rid of an Ingrown Hair Safely, According to Dermatologists

Plus, what you can do to prevent that pesky bump from coming back.



By [Korin Miller](#) Jul 21, 2020



Anyone who has used a razor understands the slow (and often painful) process of trying to get rid of an ingrown hair.

In case you're not entirely familiar, an ingrown hair is a strand that makes its way back into your skin after you shave, tweeze, or wax, resulting in a tender ball of inconvenience. "Ingrown hairs develop when the free edge of the hair does not clear the skin's surface and instead grows back into it," says Joshua Zeichner, M.D., director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. "This can lead to a red, angry bump that often becomes infected."

That's because, in some cases, "the skin identifies the hair as a 'foreign body' and mounts an immune response to it," explains board-certified dermatologist Ife J. Rodney, M.D., founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics in Fulton, MD.

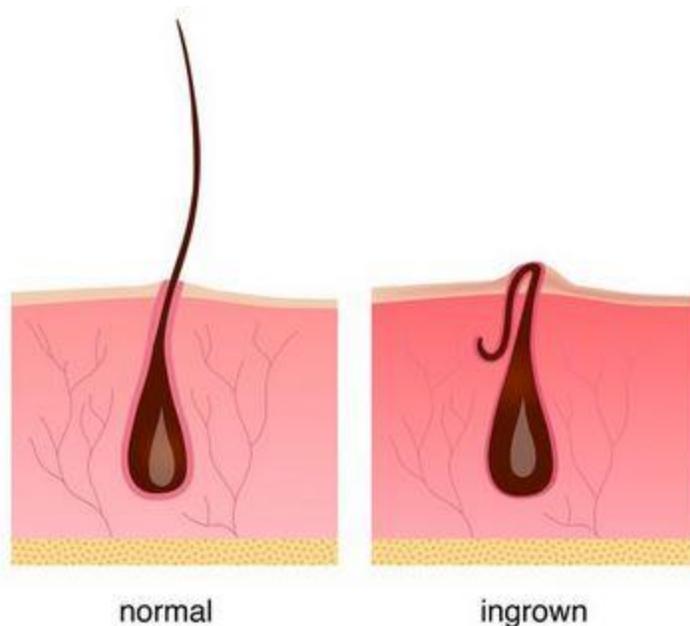
Cue the inflammation, which can cause all sorts of uncomfortable symptoms, like red and irritated skin, a small bump with a visible hair or pus in the middle, pain and tenderness, and itchiness.

## Why do some people get ingrown hairs?

Ingrown hairs are common, but some people may be more predisposed to them than others. For example, those with curly or thick hair are more prone to ingrowns because of the natural shape of their hair shaft, Dr. Zeichner says.

"Sometimes the curled hairs never actually exit the hair follicle onto the surface of the skin," Dr. Rodney adds. "Instead, the hair simply curls into a ball under the skin."

Grooming in general—including shaving, tweezing, and waxing—can also increase your risk of developing ingrowns, especially if you're using an old (read: dull) razor blade, stretching the skin to get a closer shave, or shaving against the direction your hair naturally grows.



## Where do ingrown hairs tend to form?

An ingrown hair can form on any area of skin that is tweezed, shaved, or waxed. For men, though, they're more common on the face and neck. For women, they're more likely to pop up in the bikini area, Dr. Zeichner says.

## How to get rid of an ingrown hair safely

Thankfully, most ingrown hairs tend to work themselves out over time. That's why it's really best to keep your hands (and razor) off of it until it heals. Avoid squeezing, scraping, or digging for it and let nature run its course, says **Gary Goldenberg, M.D.**, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital. "There is a risk of infection and scarring if bacteria is introduced during the extraction," he explains.

That doesn't mean you have to just suffer in silence, though. If you feel like you need to do *something*, there are a few ways to help move things along:

✓ **Apply a warm compress.** Do this for a few minutes multiple times a day to help soften your skin and calm down inflammation, Dr. Goldenberg says. It may also help the hair work its way out a little faster.

✓ **Lift the hair with a needle.** If you already see a hair loop sticking out (again, no digging for it), Dr. Zeichner says you can use a sewing needle to help remove it. First, sterilize the needle with rubbing alcohol or put it in boiling water—just let it cool before you use it. Then, slide the needle below the loop to gently lift the edge of the hair that’s growing back into the skin.

✓ **Gently exfoliate.** You can use a clean, warm washcloth and gently rub over the area to exfoliate and encourage the hair to emerge, Dr. Goldenberg says. You can also try applying a gentle lotion that contains an exfoliating acid, like the CeraVe SA Lotion for Rough & Bumpy Skin.

If the spot is still tender or inflamed after a few days or shows any signs of infection—like increasing pain, warmth in the area, or oozing—Dr. Zeichner says it’s really time to rope in your dermatologist, who can figure out the best removal method depending on the area the ingrown hair has formed.

## How to prevent ingrown hairs

Never want to deal with an ingrown hair again? Try these tips:

✓ **Make time for prep.** Before shaving an area of your skin, make sure you cleanse it thoroughly and apply a shaving cream or gel to help keep hairs soft.

✓ **Replace your razor often.** A single-blade razor is best if you’re prone to ingrown hairs, as they’re higher-quality with sharper blades. But no matter the type you use, it’s best to keep it *clean*. If you’re going with a disposable, make sure to use separate razors for separate parts of your body—a razor for your bikini line shouldn’t be used for your underarms. As soon as it feels dull, swap for a new blade.

✓ **Shave in the right direction.** Keep things moving in the natural direction your hair grows. Shaving against the grain or tugging at your skin is a recipe for irritation. Rinse the blade after each stroke.

✓ **Go for a trim instead.** If you don’t mind the look, using a trimmer instead of a razor or wax won’t cut the hairs as short or anger your skin, which may reduce your risk of ingrowns if you’re prone to them.

If these tips don’t work, check in with your dermatologist, who may be able to offer other hair removal methods that work better with your skin type and last longer.