

SELF

How to Tell If That Bump on Your Bikini Line Is an Ingrown Hair

You'll basically be a detective after this.



If you're into removing the hair on your bikini line, it might feel like having perfectly smooth skin in that area is about as likely as spotting a unicorn strolling down the street. Certain mysterious bikini-line bumps can throw you for an especially large loop. Is that an ingrown hair, zit, or could it be something more serious? Here are signs you're dealing with an ingrown hair instead of another health issue—plus when to see a doctor to be sure.

Ingrown hairs usually happen when you try to remove hair, and they can cause plenty of unwelcome symptoms.

Your hair grows out of little pockets in your skin called follicles. As the hair grows, it pushes out through the skin and looks like the stuff that you see all over your body—at least, that’s what it’s supposed to do, according to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD). But with an ingrown hair, the hair loops back and enters your skin again. How convenient.

There are a few symptoms you may notice with an ingrown, per the Mayo Clinic:

- A small, solid, rounded bump called a papule
- A small, pus-filled blister-like lesion called a pustule
- Skin darkening
- Pain around the area
- Itching
- An actually visible hair embedded into your skin like a tiny loop, which could be kind of interesting if it weren’t so frustrating

If you recently tweezed, shaved, or waxed your bikini line and are dealing with the above symptoms, chances are pretty good you have an ingrown hair.

The good news: Ingrown hairs usually go away on their own. This can take anywhere from a month to six months, per the Mayo Clinic.

Aside from ingrown hairs, here are a few other things that could look like a bump on your bikini line:

Acne: “Ingrown hairs can be very similar to pimples and cysts—they can all form around hairs and be bumps or lumps,” Jules Lipoff, M.D., assistant professor of clinical dermatology in the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, tells SELF.

Pimples happen when your hair follicles get clogged up with oil and dead skin cells, the Mayo Clinic explains. (We’ll get to cysts in a moment.)

Although you could definitely be dealing with a pimple on your bikini line, zits are more likely to show up in areas like your face, upper chest, and back than your pubic area, Jennifer Hsiao, M.D., assistant clinical professor UCLA Dermatology, tells SELF. Still, this is tricky, because the irritation, inflammation, and other symptoms that may come along with pimples can be similar to what you experience with an ingrown hair.

For instance, a pimple can come to a head, **Gary Goldenberg, M.D.**, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City, tells SELF—but this may look similar to a fluid-filled blister sprouting from an ingrown hair.

To better determine what you’re dealing with, run through that symptom list up there. You should definitely try to look closely at the area to see if you can spot a loop of hair embedded into the skin. (Even better if you have a magnifying mirror lying around.) If you can see the hair, you’re probably dealing with an ingrown.

Epidermoid cysts: These are small, non-cancerous, slow-growing bumps that can form beneath your skin when cells you were supposed to shed instead shift deeper and multiply, per the Mayo Clinic. Potential causes of this include irritation and injury to the area.

Symptoms of an epidermoid cyst include a small, firm bump under the skin, a visible blackhead at the top of the bump, expulsion of a thick, yellow, smelly material, and possibly redness, swelling, and tenderness, the Mayo

Clinic says. However, in most cases, epidermoid cysts are painless, the Mayo Clinic says, while an ingrown hair is usually tender to the touch and causes other uncomfortable issues like itching.

A sexually transmitted infection: Sexually transmitted infections don't always cause symptoms, but when they do, there's a chance they could affect your bikini line, not just more obvious areas like your vagina.

For instance, if you're dealing with molluscum contagiosum, which is an infection caused by a poxvirus, you may see small, raised, and usually white, pink, or flesh-colored bumps with a dimple or pit in the center, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says. When this infection is sexually transmitted, the bumps typically sprout up on the genitals, lower abdomen, and inner upper thighs—right around the bikini line—according to the Mayo Clinic.

HPV is another STI that can cause bumps on or close to your bikini line. These genital warts also tend to be skin-colored, Dr. Hsiao says. They can show up as a small bump or group of bumps, can be flat or look bumpy like cauliflower, and can appear on the groin, according to the Cleveland Clinic.

With that said, STIs can present in a ton of ways depending on what you're dealing with. If you think you may have one, see your doctor as soon as possible for testing.

A tumor: We put this last because it's your least likely option here, but let's walk through it just in case.

A tumor is any abnormal growth of body tissue, and it can be benign (meaning not cancerous) or malignant (cancerous), the U.S. National Library of Medicine says.

The thing about tumors is that they can vary pretty widely in presentation, so it's hard to say you can look for certain signs that you definitely have one, Cynthia Bailey, M.D., a diplomate of the American Board of Dermatology and president and CEO of Advanced Skin Care and Dermatology Inc., tells SELF.

The real point is that you don't need to immediately worry that any bump you see on your bikini line is something as potentially serious as a tumor. Again, look for those ingrown hair symptoms: Does the bump have a tiny hair if you look really, really closely? Is it persisting or growing over time, whereas ingrown hairs tend to heal themselves? Did you remove hair recently or try out a new hair removal method your body may be less used to?

Asking those kinds of questions may offer some relief. With that said, if you're at all concerned, seeing a doctor is a good idea.

Here's how to treat an ingrown hair, if that's what you're dealing with.

If you have an ingrown hair, you can take steps to ease irritation and maybe even speed healing.

If you don't want to wait for your ingrown to go away on its own, applying a warm compress to the area may help. The heat can soften and relax your skin cells which could theoretically increase the odds that they'll release the embedded hair, Dr. Goldenberg says.

You can also take measures like exfoliating gently with a soft, unused toothbrush or using a cream with an exfoliator such as salicylic acid, which sloughs off dead skin cells and may allow the hair to break free. Here's more information on the best ways to handle an ingrown on your own. Just definitely resist the urge to squeeze or pop the bump—that can lead to infection or scarring, Dr. Hsiao says.

If you can see a loop of hair over your skin, you could theoretically try to slide a sterile needle under the loop and try to gently lift out the embedded tip of your hair, the Mayo Clinic says. But that requires you actually sterilizing a needle on your own and practically performing minor surgery on an area of your body that might be tough to see, all without injuring yourself. Could you maybe do it? Sure. Is it worth risking when the bump will go away on its own? Probably not.

If you're really on the struggle bus with this and you can't deal with it any longer, or it's causing you intense pain and irritation, see your doctor. They may try the sterile needle procedure and/or prescribe medications like retinoids to remove dead skin cells trapping the hair, a steroid cream to reduce inflammation, or an antibiotic ointment if you have a minor infection, the Mayo Clinic says.

Your best bet: preventing ingrowns in the first place!

"The simplest way to get rid of them and not to get more ingrown hairs is to just let the hair grow longer," says Dr. Lipoff. If that's just not going to work for you, you may want to try removing your hair less often than you've been doing, he says.

It's also a good idea to avoid pulling your skin taut when you remove your hair (yanking the skin allows the cut hair to draw back into your skin and re-enter your skin without growing out first), and definitely don't tweeze, since this can leave a hair fragment under your skin, the Mayo Clinic says. Here are plenty of other ways to prevent ingrown hairs from showing up on your bikini line—or anywhere else.