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The Reason Why Long, Dark Hairs Pop Up in Weird Spots

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It can be startling and embarrassing to find random hairs popping up in places you wouldn't expect them, like on your chin, nose and toes. Turns out it's quite common, especially as you get older. Here's the scoop on why it happens and how to treat it.

It could be a harmless gene mutation. If you randomly find one long, dark hair on your chin, nose, toes or breasts, it may be that a single hair follicle diverted from its normal path. Atlanta dermatologist Angela Love Bookout, MD, says, "The growth phase in a hair's lifecycle determines its characteristics, such as its length and diameter. At any point, a gene mutation of a single follicle, due to trauma or environmental influences, can result in a longer, darker hair. And, once it has mutated, it will continue to grow that way."

It may be related to your hormones. New York dermatologist Debbie Palmer, MD, says that women in their 40s or 50s often experience hair growth in areas they hadn't previously. "Androgens (male hormones), specifically testosterone, are responsible for the changes," she explains. "Estrogen levels decrease during menopause, creating a disruption in the balance between estrogen and testosterone that can cause hair to grow darker or longer."

How to Get Rid of Them:

Pluck individual hairs or use a depilatory. "Plucking a random hair may work better than shaving it because there is typically a longer time for regrowth when you pluck," says Dr. Palmer. Depilatory creams are another effective solution, as they work to dissolve hair at the skin's surface without any pain. Some depilatories also reduce the density and length of the hair so that it grows back lighter, shorter and less frequently. To target an individual hair at its root, try a pair of tweezers that light up your trouble spot, like La-tweez Illuminating Tweezers (\$26). And to keep hairs at bay in general, use Completely Bare Facial Moisturizer & Hair Inhibitor (\$10), a daily moisturizer with depilatory benefits that leaves skin super smooth.

Try an at-home hair removal device. If you're looking for a more permanent answer, Dr. Bookout suggests laser hair removal, which she says is considered the gold-standard for those with darker hair. "The advent of FDA-approved, do-it-yourself laser and light-based hair removal systems has made these pesky hairs easier to treat on your own at home. I consider these systems safe as long as you follow the manufacturer's directions." We like LumaRx IPL Hair Removal Device (\$379), which has been shown to deliver impressive results in as little as three weeks.

See a dermatologist. If DIY methods aren't producing the results you hoped for, it may be time to see a doctor. "Some at-home hair removal systems aren't advised for those with certain hair

or skin colors, but a dermatologist has access to different tools and technologies,” says Dr. Bookout. “For lighter skin types with dark hair, I suggest the BBL laser, and for darker skin types with dark hair, the Nd:YAG laser. Both will permanently reduce unwanted hair.”