

Electrolysis, Explained

Do you have unsightly, unwanted hair on your face or body? Are you tired of spending time shaving, waxing, or tweezing, only to have it grow back a few days or weeks later? If you'd like to get rid of the hair once and for all, electrolysis is the permanent hair removal solution you've been searching for.

How Does Electrolysis Work?

Electrolysis is a relatively simple procedure. It can be performed using one of three techniques. Although each is different, all three share a few common characteristics.

The Basics. Regardless of the method used, the electrologist will begin by inserting an extremely thin, flexible metal probe into the hair follicle. The probe is not a needle—it does not puncture the skin. The goal of electrolysis is to destroy the hair matrix (also known as the dermal papilla), which provides the hair with the nutrients it needs to grow. Once the dermal papilla has been destroyed, the hair can be easily removed and, if done properly, will never grow back. The surrounding skin, however, remains unaffected.

The Galvanic Method. In this technique, the electricity passed through the metal probe reacts with water and salts present in an individual's skin to produce a small amount of lye (sodium hydroxide). The lye permanently destroys the hair matrix, preventing regrowth.

The Thermolysis Method. Also known as radio frequency diathermy or short wave electrolysis, this technique uses a radio wave-emitting probe to vibrate the cells of the papilla. These vibrations heat the hair matrix to approximately 118 degrees Fahrenheit, cauterizing the cells and preventing hair regrowth.

The Blend Method. As its name suggests, this technique uses elements of both galvanic and short wave electrolysis for maximum results.

How Effective is Electrolysis?

When performed by a skilled electrologist, electrolysis removes unwanted hair permanently. Unlike laser hair removal, which can only promise permanent hair *reduction*, electrolysis offers truly lasting results.

Does Electrolysis Hurt?

This depends entirely on the individual's pain tolerance—some people report feeling no pain, while others experience mild to moderate discomfort. If pain is a concern, topical anesthetics and over-the-counter pain medication can be used to make the electrolysis sessions less unpleasant.

How Long Will Treatment Take?

Good things take time, and electrolysis is no exception. Treatment time depends on a number of factors, including the size of the area involved and the number of hours per week or month you

and your electrologist can accommodate. Eyebrow shaping, for example, may require only a few sessions, while completely removing hair from the legs may take several years.

Is Electrolysis a New or Experimental Procedure?

Contrary to what you might think, electrolysis has been used to remove unwanted hair for more than 125 years. In fact, galvanic electrolysis was first used in 1875 by St. Louis ophthalmologist Charles E. Michel to treat painful ingrown eyelashes. French physician Henri Bordier developed the thermolysis method in 1924, and the next year the technique was introduced in the United States. By the late 1960s, Arthur Hinkel and Richard Lind had popularized the blend method. Over its long history, electrolysis has undergone a number of improvements in the form of more advanced equipment and standardized training and certification procedures.

Is Electrolysis Safe and Effective for Everyone?

Another advantage of electrolysis over laser hair removal is that it can be used on individuals of all skin and hair types. When performed by a trained electrologist, complications such as scarring and discoloration are extremely rare. Individuals with a pacemaker, however, should not receive electrolysis treatments, as the electrical current used might disrupt the normal functioning of the device.