

The light fantastic

*The answer to unwanted hair?
Some light treatment, reports
Sarah Gilbert.*

Once upon a time the mutinous appearance of a straggling hair or several above one's bikini line would have meant recourse to the tweezers, or the razor, or some depilatory cream, or a wax strip. All work in their own way – some more comfortably than others, it has to be admitted. But over the last decade, in salons and clinics across the country, a new technique has been ushering in a quiet revolution in hair removal and reduction. It involves no lotions, no gels, no plucking, no uprooting. Instead a special lamp beams pulses of light onto the surface of the skin. The magical result? An unblemished bikini line that will last all summer or legs as hairless as a toddler's.

Intense Pulsed Light (IPL™), as the technique is known, can be used to treat unwanted hair on any part of the body – the face, the back, the arms, the legs. Medically it can also be used to rejuvenate the skin, improving areas affected by Rosacea, flushing, broken capillaries, sun-damage and age spots.

There is, of course, no magic to IPL. The science, briefly put, is this: the lamp focuses a flash of light intense enough to travel through the tissue of the skin and reach the roots of the hair. Here the light is converted into heat energy which, in turn, removes both the roots and the hair shafts. Each pulse is capable of eliminating dozens of hairs at a time. Most treatments entail no more than four to eight sessions of about 20 minutes each. Not only is IPL highly efficient, it is also long-lasting. The hair that it removes stays removed, not just for the usual weeks achieved by other treatments, but for months and years.

If the idea of intense light transforming itself into bursts of energy capable of vanquishing whole swathes of hair-roots sounds painful, don't worry – it isn't. The pulses are a momentary discomfort only. What's more, IPL lamps are fitted

with a filter that blanks out ultra-violet light so protecting the skin from any harm. Almost anybody, whatever their skin- and hair-type (grey or very blonde hair excepted) can benefit from IPL treatment, and it works especially well for those with dark hair. Unfortunately, it is not suitable for people who are suntanned.

So, no problems? Just bowl up at your nearest beauty salon or clinic and wave goodbye to that bikini line? Well, a word or two of caution may be appropriate here. While IPL may be a wonder treatment, it is also a serious one. Which means its application requires skill and expertise. In inexperienced, untrained hands, the lamp, as well as obliterating hair, can damage the skin. The first step, then, is to make sure the salon or clinic you intend using is registered with the Healthcare Commission, a government non-regulatory body. Next, run your own checks. Ask for how long the clinic has been carrying out IPL treatments, and how many. Are the staff well trained? Can you speak to someone who has undergone a treatment there? No clinic or salon worth its reputation would object to answering any of your queries.

"Intense Pulsed Light is a fantastic way of dealing with unwanted hair," says Stephanie Green, a co-founder of MBNS, here in Thame. "But it needs fully trained and experienced practitioners if it is to be effective and, more importantly, safe." Stephanie should know. MBNS was one of the first clinics in the UK to introduce IPL treatments and recently topped a nationwide assessment of nursing skills conducted by the Healthcare Commission. "In the nine years we have been using IPL, we have completed over 10,000 treatments," explains Stephanie. "Its beauty is that it is quick, inexpensive and so much longer lasting than any other type of treatment."

Over 10,000 treatments? When it comes to paring those bikini lines or smoothing those legs, it seems more and more people are seeing the light.

