Dear Alice,

I am an incoming international student and I would like to keep doing some laser hair removal sessions. I know laser hair removal has become really a “fashion” and I would like to go somewhere safe, since I am concerned with my skin. I do not know the city, and I would like to know if there is any place that can be safe to do this.

Thank you.

Answer

Dear Reader,

From shaving, plucking, threading and waxing, to hair removal creams or chemical depilatories, to more permanent solutions like electrolysis and laser hair removal, there are pros and cons to every hair removal method. While different hair removal methods might seem more in fashion at a given time, choosing a method isn’t just based on trends and popularity. Cost, comfort, and safety are also good things to keep in mind in such hairy situations. You’ve already been doing laser hair removal sessions and would like to continue with them, it sounds like you’re a fan of the method, have considered the alternatives, and are familiar with its side effects. Putting the fate of your follicles into someone else’s hands can have serious and painful consequences, so finding a safe place is important.

When you can’t begin your search for a laser hair removal place on the recommendation of a friend, family member, or trusted practitioner, consider the following while looking for a new laser hair removal specialist in a new city:

- **Verify credentials.** Laws governing licensing requirements for laser hair removal machine technicians vary by state, so check to see if a specialist has the right qualifications for your city. Specialized training is important so that your practitioner can handle any potential complications or side effects. Check for continuing education, professional organization memberships, and other certifications to see if s/he has gone above and beyond with their training.
- **Determine experience** by going in for a consultation first? many practitioners provide free consultations. You can discuss how well suited you are to laser hair removal treatment, the possible risks, and expected outcomes. Ask how long the practitioner has been performing laser hair removal and how many procedures s/he has done. You could also ask to see pictures of her or his work.
- **Evaluate the space.** Laser hair removal procedures may be offered in many different
settings, including shopping spas, walk-in clinics, or even malls. By inspecting the space, it gives you a chance to evaluate cleanliness, professionalism, and comfort.

- **Get feedback** by reading reviews on rating web sites, such as Angie’s List, Yelp, or rate MDs.
- **Consider cost.** Multiple treatments are required to achieve permanent hair growth reduction. Since laser hair removal can be costly, be wary of any special low-cost deals? such specialists could have little or no formal training. Don’t risk a botched session that could result in a high-cost fix.

While New York City doesn’t specifically require laser hair removal technicians to be licensed, sources agree that it’s a good idea to seek out a licensed dermatologist who has significant experience with the procedure for treatment. You can also check that a specialist is using U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved equipment by consulting the FDA’s Medical Equipment Database [4].

Another option to consider using is at-home laser hair removal products, which were recently approved by the FDA. These are available over the counter and can be significantly cheaper than most professional services. Before trying an at home laser hair removal system, it’s recommended that a patient meet and discuss their options with a dermatologist first. Your primary care provider may be able to recommend a dermatologist in the area. Columbia Morningside students can call Medical Services [5] at 212-854-2284 or log-in through Open Communicator [6] to make an appointment. Columbia Medical Center students can contact Student Health Services [7] at 212-305-3400. If you are not a student at Columbia, contact your health care provider or school’s health service for an appointment to speak with a dermatologist.

Alice!
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