



# Understanding Razor Bumps

By : Yvette Stines, M.Ed, M.S.

You are in the mirror contemplating whether or not to shave. It is inevitable you want a fresh clean look, yet you're dreading the painful results and cuts due to your razor bumps. This situation is common among many men and it can be embarrassing and unattractive. "Razor bumps or folliculitis is strong hair that is caught up underneath the skin that is not able to exit the top layer," says Kimberly Patterson, a medical aesthetician and director of Blue Medspa based in Atlanta, Ga. She explains that razor bumps become present when the acid mantle of the skin is threatened through shaving and or tweezing causing the inflammation appearance or raised texture. Once the follicle becomes compressed and

the hair begins to grow back, the skin can become altered in its straight outward growth pattern and slowed by a top superficial layer of dry skin surfaces. The result is the hair is turned downward as it continues its growth cycle and the hair becomes compacted which leads to bacteria, growth and inflammation." Although razor bumps "are not hereditary or age specific they are generally found on men and women who shave," says Janice Tunnell, owner of Illusions Cosmetics in Baltimore, Md. They are "common among African-American males and females. Curly and/or coarse hair is genetically associated with African-American hair and more likely to cause razor bumps," says Chyia Hunter an aesthetician and

makeup artist based in Michigan.

There is hope for this common situation, such as preventative measures and treatments that will help your morning routine be less painful and have you looking good. If you are shaving at home, Hunter suggests the following tips: "Shave after a hot shower; the steam helps open up the pores and softens the hair; [another option] is to apply a hot towel to the area before shaving. Next, shave in the direction of the hair growth; don't shave against the grain; try not to go over the same area repeatedly; do not pull the skin tight when shaving; [when] shaving in a relaxed position this allows the hair to be cut flush with the skin surface. Finally, exfoliate the area a few times a week to

eliminate the buildup of dead skin.” Tunnell adds, “It is important to use short light strokes and always shave with the sharpest blades possible, avoiding disposable razors.” For those individuals who prefer to go to the spa, Patterson encourages her clients to become knowledgeable about their condition. “Consultations to assist and educate are suggested; the spa offers treatments [like] Laser hair removal and microdermabrasion,” she says.

If your goal is to grow a healthy beard, it may be difficult. But all three experts agree that exfoliation is important. “If you stop shaving and exfoliate a few times a week [this] prevents ingrown hair from forming,” says Hunter. “Grow the beard out for at least a month before trimming; when you trim your beard use a fine toothed comb and trimmers,” adds Tunnell. It is essential to use clean tools; other products to consider are “Sea Breeze and Silky Smooth,” according to Tunnell. At Blue Med Spa, Patterson suggests California based Spotless. This solution contains witch hazel, glycolic acid and lactic acid, with a combination of antioxidants and Vitamin E. These ingredients aid in revitalizing challenged skin conditions due to shaving and or waxing. Patterson reminds us that these ingredients help maintain healthy skin while improving the overall texture. They gently remove the top superficial layer of dry skin, which allows the new hairs to penetrate to the outer part of the skin. A challenge like skin bumps is nothing to be embarrassed about. If problems persist, please don’t hesitate to seek a medical professional.

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### *Did you know?*

**Razor bumps are common to men with coarse or curly hair.**



*Razor bumps often occur with men who have curly or coarse hair.*



*Shaving in the direction of the growing hair can reduce the occurrence of razor bumps.*