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## Intimate Grooming: What You Need to Know

Being well-groomed means more than a weekly manicure or pedicure. Here's what our experts have to say about the latest in intimate grooming.

By [Carol Sorgen](#)

WebMD Feature

### Freshen Up

You shower, you wash your hair, you put on deodorant. But what about grooming for your more intimate area? How do you deal with vaginal odor? Should you douche? And just what is a bikini wax all about anyway? For most women, these issues are just as important a part of daily grooming as brushing their teeth. Intimate grooming products are, in fact, the "hot new niche" for women, according to industry resource SpaTrade.

One of the many leaders spearheading this trend in intimate grooming products is Shari Creed, founder of SweetSpot Labs, which develops natural intimate grooming products -- such as cleansers, fragrance mists, and on-the-go wipes -- that contain only mild ingredients. Unlike drugstore lines like Summer's Eve (still very popular), brands like SweetSpot use botanical extracts and essential oils, and avoid alcohol and preservatives.

Experts don't recommend washing private areas with harsh soaps and cleansers because they can interfere with the body's pH balance. "There are bacteria that are supposed to live in the vagina," says New York gynecologist Elizabeth Poynor. "If you disturb the pH balance...you may have a difficult time getting the balance back."

Douching can cause the same problems, most gynecologists believe. The word "douche" -- French for "wash" or "soak" -- means to wash inside the vagina with water, or a mixture of water and vinegar, water and baking soda, or water and iodine. The mixtures come prepackaged in a bottle, or you can make your own. They are then squirted into the vagina through a tube or nozzle.

While douching is common, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends that you avoid the practice, so you don't interfere with your natural pH balance. Experts say douching can make you more prone to vaginal infections, which can be spread into the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries.

Also to be avoided when it comes to intimate products is talc (a main ingredient in talcum powder), which has been associated with ovarian cancer, says Poynor.

## **Bikini Bottoms**

Whether you're getting ready for swimsuit season or just want to look your best in that sexy new thong, you've probably given some thought to removing the hair along your bikini line. You can shave or use a hair removal cream known as a depilatory, but more and more women are opting for a bikini wax.

The first decision you'll need to make is just what type of bikini wax you want. This is not all that different from telling your hairstylist how to cut your hair.

Joyce Carboni, founder and director of Skinsational Spa in San Diego, describes the four basic types of bikini wax:

- **Traditional** bikini wax: hair is removed from outside the panty line.
- **Extended** bikini wax: hair is removed above the vaginal area as well, leaving a strip of hair up to 2 inches wide. Hair is also removed from around the buttocks area, but not from the labia.
- **Partial Brazilian** wax: hair above the vaginal area is removed, leaving a narrow vertical strip. Hair is also removed from both the labia and the buttocks area.
- **Full Brazilian** bikini wax: all hair is removed.

**continued...**

"Many spas and salons have different definitions though," says Carboni, "so during your appointment, make sure to be clear about what you want."

At Skinsational, Carboni uses a wax made with azulene, an essential oil with some antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties. When it comes to the type of wax used, though, what's most important is that it be a soy-based formula or other non-stick type -- designed to stick to hair but not to skin. The wax is applied with a spatula. As it cools, the aesthetician pulls off the wax, removing the hair with it. "This is a much less painful method than the strips that salons used to use," says Carboni.

After waxing, Carboni recommends applying a moisturizer with soothing, anti-inflammatory ingredients such as aloe, licorice extract, or green tea, to combat any redness. A 1% hydrocortisone cream can also ease post-wax skin irritation. Just make sure that the cream does not have any drying ingredients -- such as alcohol -- which can further irritate skin, says Carboni.

For regular maintenance, most salons recommend a once-a-month waxing. However, you might want to avoid waxing during the three days before or after your period, when skin is more sensitive, says Carboni. Taking two ibuprofen a half-hour before your waxing appointment will also help take the edge off the pain, she says.

To make your waxing experience as comfortable and thorough as possible, Carboni recommends exfoliating regularly between treatments to get rid of dead skin cells. This also allows hair to break through and can prevent ingrown hairs. Avoid exfoliating right before or right after treatment, however, so you don't irritate your skin. Because skin is thinner and more sensitive after waxing, you should also avoid hot baths or hot tubs for 24 hours after your wax; the hot water can further irritate sensitive skin, says Carboni.

"Overall, most women are pleased with the results from waxing, which lasts longer than shaving or depilatories, since the hair is being pulled out from the roots," says Carboni. She adds that a typical waxing treatment takes 15 to 30 minutes (it's longer for a Brazilian wax) and can cost anywhere from \$30 to \$60 or \$90 and up, depending on the type of bikini wax and where in the country you live.

### Laser It Away

If you don't want to make the time commitment necessary for regular waxing or shaving, you might want to consider laser hair removal for a longer-lasting fix. Lasers remove hair with a laser beam that destroys the root and the shaft of the hair.

Laser hair removal is best for those who have dark, thick, wiry hair and fair-to-medium skin, says Kenneth Beer, MD, clinical instructor in Dermatology at the University of Miami and author of *Palm Beach Perfect Skin*. This permanent treatment requires 6 to 8 sessions, with yearly touch-ups. Avoid any type of tanning (real or fake) during the process, or you might end up with a burn, says Beer, who is also director of the Palm Beach Aesthetic Center.

### Laser It Away continued...

The main problem with laser hair removal, according to Beer, is that it's gradual hair *reduction*. This means that the process involves multiple visits to a physician's office, each of which takes about 15 minutes. On average, says Beer, approximately 80% of the hairs will be gone for anywhere from several months to several years -- depending on how many treatments you have.

Another caveat, Beer adds, is that the technology works best for dark hair contrasted against light skin. Light hair, he explains, doesn't absorb the laser energy enough to generate heat and destroy the root of the hair. Dyes that paint the hairs first to make them dark have not proven effective.

Laser hair removal is also expensive, ranging from \$200 to \$400 a visit; most women buy a series of 4 to 6 sessions a year. Of course, once it's done, there's a significant time savings in not having to shave!

Experts caution that the rate of complications from laser hair removal goes up dramatically when the procedure is performed by aestheticians without a medical background in dermatology or plastic surgery. "According to the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery," says Beer, "the complication rate for the procedure when...done in an office of a dermatologist is much lower than...when performed in the mall by an anesthesiologist or in a gynecologist's office."

Lastly, for best results, look for a dermatologist or plastic surgeon who uses lasers specifically designed for hair removal. "One-size-fits-all is not a good strategy for laser hair removal," says Beer.

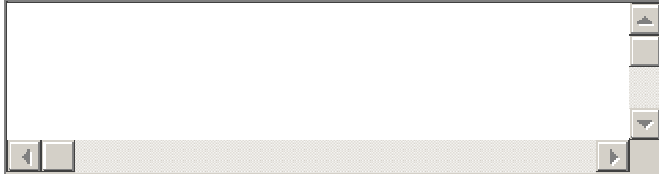
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