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BEAUTY

SMOOTH SKIN WITH LESS PAIN

New products, some for use at home, and upgraded salon treatments should make hair removal for bikini season easier.

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Keeping bikini-ready is a year-round priority in Southern California. But it's never been particularly fun.

Depilatory creams are messy, waxing hurts, razors nick and lasers and electrolysis are pricey and painful.

But good news: A new round of products, at-home gizmos and upgrades to existing salon treatments promise to make hair removal easier, less painful and more permanent.

"It's been an evolution rather than a revolution," says Dr. Alex Martin, medical director at Metropolitan Medical Care in Hollywood, which offers electrolysis.

Traditional electrolysis works by destroying each hair follicle using an electric current. New technologies now allow for it to be virtually painless. Some salons have recently started using the Aplus Platinum Plus system, whose high-speed frequency and concentrated current take a fraction of a second to destroy hair at its root. Instead of the stinging usually associated with electrolysis, the sensation now is one of a low heat. It still isn't cheap — the process can cost around \$180 for one treatment for both underarms — and it still takes several visits before growth is visibly diminished.

The same is true for lasers, another professional hair removal system that has had only limited success because the heat against the skin can result in blistering. And because the wavelengths interact with the pigment found in hair follicles, lasers haven't worked as well on those with light hair.

But the newer Soprano XL system now being used at salons has a tip that cools the skin while the pulses of diode laser energy damage the hair follicle beneath. The applicator is used in a sweeping circular motion that allows more coverage in less time. Long Beach cosmetic surgeon Marcel Daniels says an entire back can be done in 30 minutes. The hair starts to fall out over a couple of weeks and because only a percentage of it grows back, some five to seven sessions about six weeks apart need to be scheduled to get a complete halt in growth. Again, it's not cheap: the underarms can cost \$500 for five treatments, while the back or other large



MARK BOSTER Los Angeles Times

EVOLVING: Electrolysis, lasers, waxes and lotions have improved.

body areas can run to a few thousand dollars.

Permanence does seem to be the buzzword in hair removal — even with something much more mainstream like waxing. A new salon product, Depilar, is an enzyme-based gel formula that is applied immediately after waxing to break down hair follicles and discourage regrowth.

Peter Lassen, president and chief executive of Norlab USA, which makes Depilar, said that since its launch late last year, it is being used in about 200 salons around the country. It cannot be used at home because the hair needs to be expertly removed. And even though it is a simple gel application, including Depilar as part of a waxing treatment can more than double the cost.

Kenya Barber, owner of Be Well Groomed, a waxing studio inside the Chess & Burman Salons in Los Angeles, has been using Depilar on clients who ask for it. "If it's done enough, it will eliminate the hair," she said.

There are also innovations in waxing itself.

Katherine Goldman, founder and owner of Stript Wax Bar in three California locations, uses a European style hard wax that shrink-wraps around the hair and peels off, pulling the hair out very cleanly from the root. She also recommends a creamy lavender-infused wax for large areas and has also used chocolate waxes and eucalyptus waxes for their astringent properties.

"Every couple of years, there's a new gen-

eration of waxes," said Veronica Barton-Schwartz, owner of Veronica Skin & Body Care Center in Malibu, where "everyone is always in their little bikinis, whether here or in the Jacuzzi in Aspen or Vail." Barton-Schwartz also uses cream essential oil, titanium dioxide waxes and muslin cloth for what she believes is the cleanest pull.

As far as pain goes, aestheticians recommend No-Scream Cream, a topical anesthetic that sells for under \$20, which decreases waxing-related pain by numbing the area. It should be applied about 45 minutes before waxing. Jeni Garrett, president and chief executive of Woodhouse Day Spas, a chain with 23 locations, said the number of waxing treatments done at the spas has risen 14% because of the cream.

"The fact that you have something out there that can reduce the pain makes clients want to come back in," she said.

At the newly opened Beauty Collection store in Malibu, the Threading Bar is busy, said aesthetician Alex Lobos.

"People are starting to realize the benefits of threading, especially if they've done more aggressive things like electrolysis," she said. The ancient process, where a cotton thread slices across the surface of the skin lifting out hair follicles, is quick and inexpensive; Lobos says the upper lip can be done in under five minutes and costs \$15.

For do-it-yourselfers, a host of at-home products are holding their own.

Shawn Tavakoli, chief executive of the Beauty Collection stores, says there is high demand for DS Laboratories Keramene Body Hair Minimizer, a lotion that is used twice a day to gradually slow down regrowth. A 6-ounce tube sells for around \$65 on Amazon, among other places.

Also proving popular for at-home use is the NoNo, which is based on laser technology and which essentially uses a heated fiber to destroy hair at its root. The new \$230 NoNo 8800 was launched late last year, and has sold about 23,000 units through the Home Shopping Network, according to Adam Dinkes, the company's national training director. It can be used anywhere on the face or body, and causes no pain or discomfort but does need to be used a couple of times a week in order to notice a significant reduction in growth over about six weeks.

Also doing well at retail is the Tria, another at-home laser hair removal device, which sells for about \$600, according to Robin Coe-Hutshing, founder of Studio BeautyMix at Fred Segal.

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