

SMOOTH SAILING



Simple ways to help waxing clients combat ingrown hairs

by Crickett Enos

Red. Irritated. Bumpy. Painful. Unsightly. Frustrating. These are the words most often used by our clients to describe their top complaint when it comes to Brazilian hair removal. Ingrown hair.

Whether clients wax, shave, trim, or sugar, ingrown hair is a nasty little side effect that can happen when grooming the delicate skin in this intimate area.

Ingrown hairs are nothing new, but they have certainly gotten a lot more attention in the last decade or so since Brazilian waxing has become more common among the masses. That is not to say that Brazilian waxing causes ingrown hair—it has just made it a more acceptable topic of conversation.

As waxing experts, it is our duty to help our clients solve their ingrown hair issues. To do that, it's important to understand the ingrown hair: what it is, how it happens, and how to treat it. We also need to set proper expectations with our clients so they are not disappointed.

An ingrown hair is a hair that becomes trapped under the skin and cannot exit the follicle. Since the hair cannot exit the follicle, it has no choice but to turn around and go back into or under the skin. This can take many different forms, from a minor annoyance to a huge infection.

CAUSES OF INGROWN HAIR

The three most common causes of ingrown hair in the Brazilian area are dry and dehydrated skin, friction, and improper waxing techniques.

Dry/Dehydrated Skin

It's safe to say that most everyone has dry or dehydrated skin in the Brazilian area. It's not an area that typically gets a lot of TLC when it comes to skin care. When skin is dry or dehydrated, it is the perfect atmosphere for ingrown hairs to flourish because:

1. **Dry skin creates a barrier**, making it difficult for the hair underneath to exit.
2. **When skin is dry**, tight, and dehydrated, it holds onto the hair, preventing the wax from extracting it from the follicle without breaking it. Once a hair is broken, it is more likely to become ingrown.

Friction

Who doesn't love their favorite pair of skinny jeans that hug every curve, or those tight spandex yoga pants that hold everything in? But when it comes to having a drama-free Brazilian, tight clothing of any kind (and the friction it creates) can cause problems. The friction that tight clothing creates can cause hair to break and turn back into the follicle, then become ingrown.

In addition, friction causes heat. The heat created by the friction can cause the skin to become dehydrated, and as mentioned earlier, the skin will then hold on to the hair instead of letting it exit cleanly from the follicle during waxing.

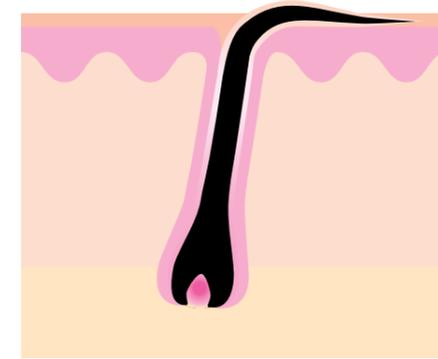
Improper waxing technique

When removing the wax—either strip or hard—the skin should be pulled as taut as possible to protect both the skin and the hair. To keep skin taut, enlist the help of your client. Four hands are better than two when it comes to keeping the skin nice and tight.

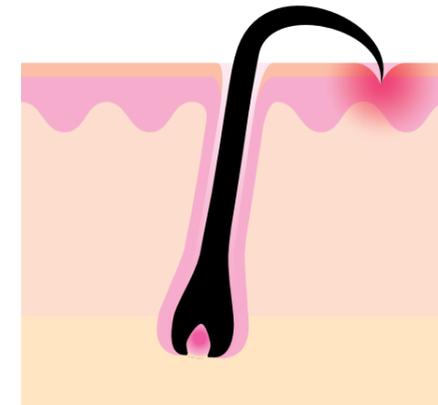
The removal hand should firmly grasp the wax strip, while the free hand pulls the skin taut in the opposite direction. This is to keep the skin from “bouncing back” and causing lifting, tearing, or bruising. The removal hand will quickly pull the strip of wax off while



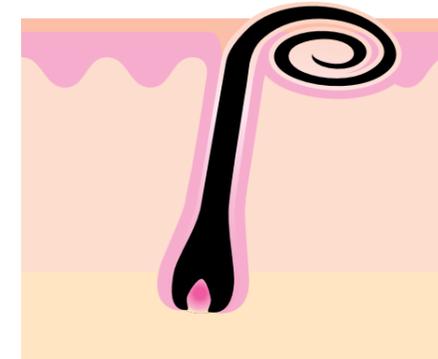
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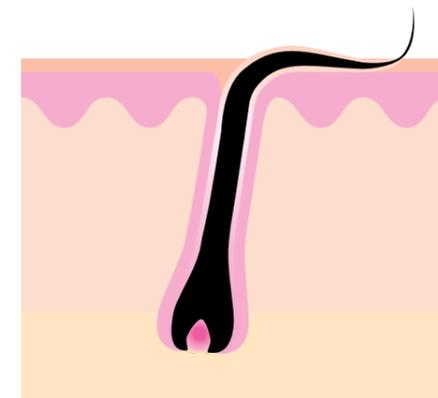
The “common” ingrown—when the hair cannot exit the follicle and runs parallel just under the skin.



The “friction” ingrown—when friction causes a hair that has exited the follicle to turn back and create an ingrown hair.



The “tornado” ingrown—when hair cannot exit the follicle, it can turn back and keep growing around and around in the follicle.



The “traveling” ingrown—this hair couldn't exit where it was, so it traveled under the skin until it found another way out.

keeping the hand low and close to the body. The key is to avoid pulling the strip up and away from the body on removal. If the strip is pulled up and away, it will cause hairs to break, and as we learned, broken hairs are more likely to turn into ingrown hairs.

TREATING INGROWNS

The most common solution we offer when it comes to treating ingrown hairs is to exfoliate, exfoliate, exfoliate! Although exfoliation is a large piece of the puzzle, it's not the only piece.

It's important to exfoliate before waxing to remove dead skin cells, which will allow the hair to properly exit the follicle. Dead cells are our protective coating and serve a useful purpose; however, they can be a contributing factor in the creation of ingrown hair.

The most common exfoliating ingredients used in the treatment of ingrown hairs are keratolytics and enzymes. A keratolytic is an ingredient that works to keep pores clean and loosen the bond of the dead cells from the live cells. The most common keratolytic ingredients for ingrown hairs are benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid, and glycolic acid.

Enzymes are considered a gentler approach to exfoliation. They work by "eating away" the bond between the dead cells and live cells to reveal the soft and supple layers. Two of the most commonly used enzymes are pumpkin and papaya.

The main goal when treating ingrown hair is to get the skin in the best condition possible. Ideally, we want the skin soft and supple. The softer and more supple the skin, the easier it is for the hair to "pop" out of the follicle instead of turning back in.

Soft, supple skin is created with a combination of exfoliation and hydration. It's important to note that there is a difference between hydrating and moisturizing. Moisturizers, in general, don't add moisture to the skin; they simply seal in the current

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condition of the skin.

Think of it this way: We've all had times when our hands are unbearably dry. We reach for the moisturizer and slather it on. Ahh ... that feels so much better, right? Then, 10 minutes later, our hands feel dry again. Why? Because moisturizers add oil to the surface of the skin to create a seal. All we did was seal in the dryness.

When treating ingrown hairs, the goal is to hydrate the skin. To hydrate means the ingredients will penetrate the top layers of the skin to hydrate it from within.

My two favorite hydration ingredients are shea butter and jojoba oil.

SETTING PROPER EXPECTATIONS

Educating waxing clients about the risk of ingrown hairs is key to getting them on board with following your suggestions for home care. It's important that clients understand:

- 1. Those who suffer** from ingrown hairs may always suffer to some degree, but with the proper product and home-care regimen, their discomfort can be greatly reduced.
- 2. Those new to Brazilians** are going to feel "stubby" after their waxing appointment for the first 3–5 sessions, until the skin's condition improves and allows the hairs to be removed more cleanly from the follicle.

For clients who may have the occasional ingrown hair or are just in need of some hydration, introduce them to a hydrating product as a safeguard against potential ingrown hairs. This preventive maintenance will keep the skin soft and supple so your clients always get the best hair-removal result in the most comfortable way, and it will help keep ingrown hairs at bay.

Home Care Matters

The suggested home-care plan for clients with moderate to severe (5 or more) ingrown hairs is:

- Exfoliation 2–5 times a week, depending on severity
- Hydration applied to the area twice a day



WHAT NOT TO DO

It's just as important to know what *not* to do to avoid prolonging or making the issue worse. Here are my top two things to avoid.

Do not perform surgery

As tempting as it may be to get in there with the point-tip tweezers and dig out those hairs, it's best to let the products do the heavy lifting for you. Digging, picking, and poking at the ingrown has the potential to further aggravate the follicle and create inflammation and possibly infection. The only time it's appropriate to try to coax the hair free is if it is already half out of the follicle and all you need to do is gently lift the hair away without having to invade the skin.

Do not tweeze after waxing

If you can't get the strays with wax, then leave them until next time. When we tweeze after waxing, it does two things:

- 1. Creates an unrealistic** expectation that all hair will be gone. When the skin is not in good condition, the client will have more "stubble" in the beginning. As they use their home care, their skin will become soft and supple and it will release those hairs more easily with each appointment. Everyone needs to be patient during this process.
- 2. As some esties do not** tweeze properly, they end up breaking hair instead of removing it cleanly from the follicle. Follow waxing with more wax to grab as many strays as you can, then educate the client by letting them know that as their skin becomes healthier with the use of home care, they will get better hair removal results each time they come in.

Successfully treating ingrown hairs is possible! It's all about setting client expectations, providing the proper home care, and practicing a little patience. 🧘