

# News

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\*\*\*\*UT research aimed at helping women with  
excess hair

DALLAS--Most American women would never submit to the cultural imperative of a society that required them to cover their hair in public. Yet many would be relieved if they were required to wear enveloping robes or veils to hide their lower faces.

These women are neither followers of an esoteric cult nor desert dwellers. They suffer from a condition that they're not likely to discuss even with their best friends: hirsutism, or excess body hair.

Body hair takes many forms. "Its growth is a graded characteristic," said Dr. Bruce Carr, professor of obstetrics and gynecology at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, who is studying hirsutism. The condition may involve an excess of scattered hairs, hair growing in thick clumps or covering large areas of the body. The hair itself may be downy, woolly or Brillo-like. It may appear on only one or two areas or in many places.

There are several causes of excess hair growth, Carr said. The most common is polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCO), due to the overproduction of testosterone. In PCO the ovaries develop numerous cysts and the woman usually experiences menstrual irregularities.

While there is no rule-of-thumb for the "normal" amount of body hair on an adolescent or adult female, clinical reports indicate that

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as many as one in 10 females may be hirsute or overly hairy. Males may not mind growing hair on their upper lips, chins, chests, backs, abdomens, arms and legs--all areas vulnerable to hirsutism--but the financial success of the cosmetic hair-removal industry testifies to the fact that women find such hair growth unacceptable. Women are the major consumers of depilatories (hair removers), waxing kits and electric razors designed for delicate areas. They are the main customers at electrolysis and waxing salons.

Carr and his associates at UT Southwestern have initiated a drug study that hopes to find more effective treatment for hirsutism while learning more about the workings of the female hormone system.

Current therapies to control hirsutism include inhibiting androgens, such as testosterone, at the site of the androgen receptor or suppressing production of male hormones. Carr said the most widely used treatment is an oral contraceptive that combines estrogen and progestin, which interfere with the normal hormone production of the ovaries.

The Southwestern team research is comparing the effectiveness of injected gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) analogs, which are synthetic hormones, oral contraceptives and treatment that combines oral contraceptives with GnRH-analog injections. Women from 18 to 35 are being accepted for the studies of PCO-caused hirsute conditions as well as hirsutism for which the cause is not known.

"We hope these studies are going to answer the question about the best treatment for this condition for many more patients than those in the study," said Carr. The researcher said it is best to begin treatment as young possible because as a woman gets older the

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condition "can get worse and worse and worse--and usually does."

Participants in the studies will be evaluated on the basis of the amount of hair growth as well as the quality of that hair.

The research volunteers will follow one of the three treatment regimens for a period of six months. A series of medical tests will be conducted over two four-day periods in UT Southwestern's General Clinical Research Center, a mini-research outpatient clinic associated with the National Institutes of Health, the federal funding agency for the project.

Working along with Carr and his colleagues in UT Southwestern's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology is Dr. Neil Breslau, associate professor of internal medicine. Breslau, an expert in mineral metabolism, is conducting associated calcium studies.

Women interested in participating in the study should contact Tracey Triplett, project research nurse, at (214) 590-8815.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.