



Dr Hrishikesh Pai, infertility specialist, Lilavati Hospital, on the causes and treatment of hirsutism.

eve talk

Hirsutism is development of excessive male pattern hair growth in females. It affects 5 – 10 percent of all women and the incidence is much higher in a condition called Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD). Too much hair at the wrong places is emotionally painful for any woman.

CAUSES:

The most common causes of hirsutism are idiopathic hirsutism and PCOD. Other less important causes are some drugs; some adrenal gland over-activity and it can also be associated with some ovarian tumors.

Basically, the main pathology is the increase in the androgen levels in the body. It is characterized by excessive hair growth especially over the face, intermammary area, over the abdomen in the midline and over the inner parts of the thighs.

If hirsutism is associated with PCOD, then there are other problems such as menstrual irregularity, amenorrhoea, weight gain, inability to conceive and glucose intolerance.

DIAGNOSIS:

It needs evaluation in the form of some tests to know the cause of the same. The blood tests include:

1. Serum testosterone levels - maybe higher than normal females.
2. Other testosterone derivatives.
3. Hormonal assay to diagnose PCOD.

Ultrasonography for diagnosing PCOD should be done.

TREATMENT:

The therapy for hirsutism is usually continued indefinitely due to increased production of androgen which may be lifelong.

Treatment includes weight loss in patients who are obese, as it can reduce the androgen production and hence slower the hair growth. Healthy diet in the form of less fatty food, reduced sugar and junk food intake along with avoidance of fried food can help in weight reduction. Also exercise in the form of brisk walking, jogging with yoga and meditation may be of great help.

Physical methods of removing hair or making it less visible can be offered to the patients. This includes different methods such as laser treatment, epilation, shaving, waxing etc.

Various drugs can be tried to get the testosterone levels down and hence control the hair growth and recurrence. But it is best to consult the doctor before trying any oral medications. It is not advisable to buy the drugs on your own and take them without a doctor's advice.

All the same, it cannot be neglected as the reason for the same needs to be evaluated, as other conditions such as ovarian or adrenal tumors may be life threatening. Hence, seeing a doctor if such symptoms arise is important to diagnose and treat the condition on time. 🌸