

All About Shaving

Learning to shave is usually a ritual passed on from father to son, but FTMs might not have that traditional experience. This may actually be a blessing in disguise, because sometimes our father's techniques of shaving are not terribly good for the skin!

This chapter contains numerous sections on the topic of shaving, including shaving tips and methods, basic information about shavers and shaving products, and advice for guys with sensitive skin who experience problems with ingrown hairs or razor bumps.

SHAVING METHODS:

WET SHAVING

Wet shaving as described below refers to shaving done with a disposable razor or a safety razor. These rules also apply if you happen to be using a straight razor, but there are a few specifics to know about straight razors that you will want to read up on before committing to that task ([click here to read about straight razors](#)).

Throughout the wet shaving section, you'll find exceptions and tips noted for men who suffer from razor bumps and ingrown hairs. There is an additional section devoted to this topic as an addendum to the wet shaving section. If you suffer from razor bumps or ingrown hairs, be sure to read **both** sections, as the combination of proper wet shaving technique plus the use of special sensitive skin products and tips will often clear up the problem.

Keep in mind that much of the advice for wet shaving does not apply to those using electric shavers; see the section on electric shavers for specific advice on that topic.

Before you Shave: Waking up the skin

When you first wake up in the morning, your skin tends to be puffy and swollen. If you shave in the mornings, wait until at least 20 minutes after you have woken up before you begin your shave to let the puffiness go down. When your skin has reached its normal tautness, the hairs will be closer to the surface and easier to shave.

Pre-Shave Cleansing

Some skin care experts recommend cleansing your face with a facial soap before shaving to help remove dead skin and excess dirt and oil, thus freeing up any ingrown hairs and preventing the clogging of your razor. If you do cleanse your face before shaving, don't just wash with ordinary soap, as it will dry your skin. Use warm water and a facial soap or cleansing scrub designed for men's skin.

If you have problems with ingrown hairs or razor bumps, and you may wish to use a pre-shave cleansing product specifically designed to prevent those problems ([see the section on "Sensitive Skin" for more tips on avoiding razor bumps and ingrown hairs](#)).

Warm Water Prep

Even if you choose to skip the pre-shave wash, be sure to use warm water to thoroughly wet your face before applying your shaving cream or gel. Massaging your face with warm water makes the skin more pliable and opens the pores, plus it helps soften your whiskers. Soft, wet whiskers tend to be easier to shave. Think of when you get your hair cut-- it is much easier for your barber to cut your hair wet than dry.

You can easily accomplish this task by showering *before* you shave. Avoid using extremely hot water, as it might dry out your skin.

Applying a warm, wet towel or washcloth to your face for a few minutes can also help soften your hair and open your pores. For men with very coarse whiskers, you may want to apply the hot towel a few times in succession to really loosen things up.

Applying shaving cream/gel/shave soap

Use a cream, shave soap, or gel that is specifically designed for shaving. Don't use ordinary soap to lather your face, as it will dry out your skin. Avoid low-quality foams, as they tend to be less effective than creams or gels and also may dry your skin.

Apply your cream or gel by massaging it in a thin, even layer. If you are using a glycerin-based shave soap, apply an even layer using a badger bristle shave brush ([click here for details on shave brushes](#)). The idea is to use enough cream or gel to lubricate your skin and soften your beard while helping the razor glide smoothly with minimal irritation; too much cream or gel will cause your razor to skip and clog.

Applying Shave Oil

As with gels and creams, thoroughly wet your face with warm water. Put 4 to 5 drops of shaving oil in your hand and massage it into your face. Keep the face wet while you shave; if it is drying out, massage in more water. Shaving oils are different from gels and foams in that you cannot easily see where you have applied them. This is good if you are creating a goatee or side burns, as you can see exactly what you are doing. It can be bad if you forget where you already shaved, as you don't want to irritate the same spot by shaving over it repeatedly.

You can also apply a pre-shave oil as a first layer, underneath shaving creams and gels, to help soften the beard and improve the quality of the shave.

Go With the Grain

When wet shaving, it is best to **shave "with the grain" of your hair growth**. Which way is with the grain? Rub your hand on your stubbly face. In one direction it will feel more rough than in the other and will resist the push of your hand-- kind of like when you rub a cat backwards! That rough direction is against the grain, while the other, smoother-feeling direction is "with the grain." On your cheeks and chin, this will tend to be downward. On your neck, this will tend to be upward, though everyone's hair growth varies. Some men's facial hair swirls in certain patches. The best way to find the grain direction is to shave and then let your stubble grow back for a couple of days, and rub.

Why shave with the grain? Because there is less of a chance of nicks and cuts, and because it reduces the chance of ingrown hairs and razor bumps. When you shave against the grain, the razor's blade catches against the hair and pulls it slightly further away from the surface of the skin. This results in an increased likelihood of shaving the hair at a level slightly below your skin's surface-- one reason why ingrown hairs develop. Also, when you shave you are not simply taking off hair, you are taking off a fine layer of skin (you are "exfoliating"). Shaving with the grain tends to be a little easier on your skin as well, as the razor tends to travel a smoother path with the grain of hair growth.

If you've been shaving against the grain up until this point, then you it might take some time to get a close shave by going with the grain. Keep trying; your face may take a week or two to adjust to a new method of shaving.

****A note on going against the grain****

You might have some particularly stubborn stubble that needs to be shaved against the grain (or sideways **across** the grain, which is a little less harmful than directly against the grain) in order to attain a close shave. If that is the case, shave as much as you can with the grain, then re-lather and shave those trouble areas across or against the grain. Some guys use this

method for a really, really close shave. If you try this approach, remember to re-lather and repeat only after getting through your first shave *with* the grain.

If you are prone to ingrown hairs/razor bumps, avoid this practice at all costs as it will most likely make the problem worse.

Shaving Method

Be methodical when you shave-- don't just shave here and there, as you will miss spots or go over the same spot too many times. A good method is to begin with your side burns, cheeks, and neck. Finish with the upper lip and chin, where the whiskers tend to be heavier. Saving them until last will allow the cream or gel to soften them more.

While you are shaving, use your free hand to *gently* pull the skin taut to avoid nicks. If you pull your skin to be very taut, you will get a closer shave; however, if you suffer from razor bumps/ingrown hairs you might want to avoid pulling the skin too tightly, as you'll risk cutting the hairs slightly below skin level.

Try not to repeat strokes, as this can irritate your skin. Make sure you lift the blade after each stroke, thus reducing the chance of cuts and nicks. Don't press too hard-- your razor should glide over your face. If you have to press too hard it is time for a new blade.

Rinse Your Razor as You Go

Regularly rinse your razor in hot water. If necessary, tap it on the sink to dislodge clogged hair and cream or gel (but avoid tapping the blade directly, as this will obviously dull it). A clogged blade will not perform well.

Rinse Your Face with Cool Water

When you are done shaving rinse off excess cream with cool water. Gently pat your face dry. Do not rub.

Apply Toner or Aftershave Balm

Avoid using alcohol-based aftershave, as it will dry out your skin. Instead, apply a balm or toner with ingredients that will moisturize and nourish your skin. After-shave toners help remove any residue left over from shaving, close the pores, and refresh the skin.

If you have problems with acne, find an aftershave product that is "non-comedogenic," which is a fancy way of saying that it will not clog your pores. If you have problems with ingrown hairs/razor bumps, you may want to use a product designed specifically to combat that problem.

Caring for your Blade

Rinse out your razor carefully with hot water at the end of your shave. Allow the razor to air dry naturally; drying it on a towel can dull the blade.

Blades should be changed every 4-6 shaves, or more frequently if you have a very coarse beard. A dull blade will cause you to push down harder in order to be effective, pulling at your hairs and skin and causing irritation and possibly ingrown hairs.

If You've Cut Yourself Shaving

Use a styptic pencil (made primarily of alum) or an alum block to dab on the affected area to stop the blood flow. Alum has astringent properties (it closes pores), and has been used by men for years to help heal shaving nicks.

There are a couple of other products on the market to heal shaving cuts, including roll-on products that contain natural ingredients such as aloe. These can be a more soothing alternative to the styptic pencil.

SENSITIVE SKIN:

Preventing razor burn, rashes, and ingrown hairs/razor bumps

Before trying to treat sensitive skin problems that arise due to shaving, it is important to diagnose each problem correctly. Described below are four common problems caused by shaving or shaving products.

Razor Burn

Razor burn is a temporary irritation, redness or swelling of the skin. If you dry shave, shave without adequate cream or gel, or shave too hard or too fast, your skin will likely show some irritation. If you're suffering from razor burn, look for a soothing after-shave balm. Avoid alcohol-based aftershaves. You also may also want to avoid shaving for a few days in order to let the skin heal itself. Razor burn should go away in a few days, and it is easily prevented through the methods outlined in the "[Wet Shaving](#)" section.

Rashes (other than razor burn)

Rashes other than razor burn can be caused by allergic or other adverse reactions to the skin/shaving products you are using. If you believe this to be the case, try unscented products and/or products designed specifically for sensitive skin. Definitely stop splashing on alcohol-based after-shaves and colognes. Use an after-shave balm that soothes the skin with natural ingredients and no heavy scents.

Razor Bumps/Ingrown Hairs

Razor bumps and ingrown hairs are medically known as "pseudofolliculitis barbae." **Razor bumps** result from a *hair growing out of the skin, curling around and then growing back in*. **Ingrown hairs** form when *hair, growing back after shaving, fails to grow out of the follicle*.

In either case, hairs being lodged in the skin causes inflammation, followed by pus formation. Pseudofolliculitis barbae appear as tender, red, raised bumps. For this reason, they are sometimes mistaken for acne. If you are unable to tell if you are experiencing acne or pseudofolliculitis barbae, ask your doctor or dermatologist for help in diagnosing your problem.

Preventing Razor Bumps and Ingrown Hairs

In order to prevent razor bumps and ingrown hairs, you should follow the basic shaving advice given in the "[Wet Shaving](#)" section (with exceptions as noted therein for sensitive skin). Also keep in mind the additional shaving pointers listed below.

Find the right razor and products for **your skin**

For wet shaving, try switching to a single blade razor, as double and triple blades tend to pull up on the whisker and then cut it below the epidermis (the top layer of the skin).

If an ordinary single blade does not seem to help, specialized razors have been developed to cut the hair slightly longer than typical razors. Product lines such as the "Bump Fighter Shaving System" include such razors, as well as pre-shave and after-shave products that help with tough cases of razor bumps. Other specialty razors have been developed to shave sensitive areas of the face and body, and those may also be appropriate for preventing razor bumps.

Razor bumps tend to be a more serious problem for men with kinky or curly hair, especially Black men. As such, there are a number of products that have been designed and marketed specifically for Black men to reduce and prevent razor bumps ([see also the section on "Shaving Powders/Depilatories"](#)). Men of all colors who suffer from razor bumps may benefit from exploring these product lines.

Some men who suffer from ingrown hairs claim that electric shavers are helpful to them, yet other men say that electric shavers make the problem worse. You may wish to try an electric razor if the proper wet shaving methods have failed to solve your problem. Keep in mind that many electric shavers have a money-back guarantee, so you may be able to try one with minimal financial risk ([see more details in the "Electric Shavers" section](#)).

Use an exfoliating facial cleanser

Use a cleanser designed to exfoliate your skin at least once or twice a week to remove dead cells and help free up trapped hair. You may also want to try a pre-shave cleanser or treatment designed specifically for prevention of razor bumps and ingrown hairs.

Thoroughly wet your beard before shaving

This is generally a good rule in any case, but especially so for those with ingrown hair problems. Make sure your beard has been wetted with warm water for at least 5 minutes before shaving. A good time to shave is immediately after you shower. Wetter hair is much easier to shave, and thus your razor will cause less pulling and irritation.

Shave with the grain of your hair growth

This is so important it bears repeating. Review the tips about shaving with the grain in the previous "[Wet Shaving](#)" section.

Minimize repeat shaving strokes

Fewer strokes means less irritation and less chance of cutting the hairs too close.

Shave with the skin in a neutral relaxed position

This is the best way to shave your beard close, but not too close. Excessive pulling and stretching of the skin causes the hair to protrude a bit farther out than normal. Shaving over stretched skin may cut the hairs below the surface of resting skin, thus increasing the risk of ingrown hairs.

Use shaving gels and aftershave balms specifically designed to prevent razor bumps

As mentioned previously, product lines have been specifically designed for men who suffer from razor bumps and ingrown hairs.

Avoid shaving over already irritated razor bumps

Shaving over bumps might cause them to bleed and become more inflamed. If possible, you might want to avoid shaving for a few days and try a skin product regimen designed to dislodge and soothe ingrown hairs before you begin shaving again.

How to dislodge ingrown hairs

Using a cleanser featuring glycolic acid before you shave can help dislodge ingrown hairs. Glycolic acid helps remove dead skin. You can also try to dislodge them by *very gently* rubbing a clean, soft-bristled toothbrush or clean, rough washcloth over the affected area in a circular motion.

In some instances the hair may grow out of the follicle but become trapped under a fine layer of skin. For hairs that you can clearly see growing along under the skin, simply free them up with a sharp pair of **sterilized** tweezers (sterilize with alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or boiling in water for 15 minutes). Do not pick them out with your fingers, as this will probably make

the problem worse. Also, do not pluck the hair all the way out, just set it free and let the area heal.

The easiest solution: Grow your Beard

Perhaps the easiest way to avoid razor bumps and ingrown hairs is to grow out a beard or goatee. You may need to follow a skin regimen to help loosen and free up previously ingrown hairs, but once they are out they should no longer pose a problem, and your skin should heal nicely.

See a Dermatologist

If over-the-counter solutions and using proper shaving methods do not help clear up your skin and ingrown hair problems, it might be helpful to seek the advice of a dermatologist.

SHAVING POWDERS/DEPILATORIES

There are a few brands of shaving powders on the market that have been formulated for Black men to help stop razor bumps-- these can usually be found in the shaving section of your drugstore. Shaving powders are used instead of a razor; they chemically cause the hair to be removed from the skin.

Men of all colors might find success with shaving powder. However, the key for *all* men is to test the product on a small area of the face to make sure there is no adverse reaction or irritation associated with the product. Depilatories can be irritating to those with sensitive skin.

You should always follow the specific instructions on the label for the shaving powder you have chosen. In general, the process involves mixing up a couple of tablespoons of powder with an equal amount of cool water to create a soft paste. You then apply the paste mixture over the area of your beard, without rubbing it in. Allow the paste to remain on the beard for 3-5 minutes, then remove with a spatula using smooth strokes (avoid scraping). **DO NOT LEAVE ON THE SKIN FOR MORE THAN 5 MINUTES**, as the skin may become irritated or burned. Wash thoroughly with cold water and make sure that all of the product has been removed from your skin. Avoid contact with the eyes, and do not use within 36 hours of shaving.

ELECTRIC SHAVERS

Unlike blades, electric shavers work by shearing the whiskers--the hair enters the perforated metal heads or foils of the shaver and is cut by the moving blades inside. Most electric shavers are dry shavers (i.e. they don't require shaving gel or water), though there are some wet/dry electric models on the market. This guide covers the more common dry shaver models; if you do choose a wet/dry model, follow the specific instructions of your model for use and care.

Benefits of dry electric shaving are ease of use and less chance of cuts and scrapes. It is debatable as to whether wet blade shaving or electric shaving is faster, but some men find that the electric shaver is less messy and more convenient.

First-time electric shaver users

If you are new to shaving, or have been using a blade razor and are switching to electric, give your face 2-3 weeks to adjust to electric shaving. Also, don't fluctuate back and forth between

blade shaving and electric shaving during that period if you can help it. Though your first few shaves may be less than perfect, many men report that once their face has gotten "used to" the electric shaver, it works very well for them.

During your trial and error process of finding the right shaver, keep in mind that many brands of electric shavers have money back guarantees. Be sure to check the guarantee for the shaver you purchase and plan accordingly.

Types of Dry Electric Shavers

There are two major types of electric shavers: **foil shavers** and **rotary shavers**. Personal preference and trial and error will determine which type is better for you.

Foil shavers use an oscillating (back and forth) motion to cut hairs through a foil (also known as a screen). The blades in a foil shaver are positioned in line; they may contain 1-4 rows of blades. Single foil shavers have one cutter covered by one foil. These are ideal for men who are just starting to shave or those with slow beard growth. Double foil shavers have two cutters covered by two foils; triple foil shavers have three cutters covered by three foils, etc.

Rotary shavers use a cutting system based upon circular blades that rotate under a slotted head or heads. They may contain 1-3 rotating blades and heads, and the heads may be designed to swivel with the contours of your face.

ELECTRIC SHAVING METHODS

Preparation

Dry electric shavers require the opposite of what you want when preparing for a traditional wet shave with a blade. With an electric shaver, you want the hairs to be dry and stiff before you begin, so they are easier to shear once they've gotten inside the heads of the shaver. Because of this, you should *not* start by washing your face or thoroughly wetting the beard with water.

Instead, you may want to prep with a pre-shave lotion designed for electric shavers (such as "Electric shave"). Such products, often alcohol-based, dry up the oils and moisture on your skin and make the whiskers stand straight up.

General Rules

When using an electric shaver you can shave either against the grain of your whiskers or with the grain (see the "Wet Shaving" section for information on [finding the grain of your beard growth](#)). In the case of a rotary shaver, make small circular motions with the shaver head on your face. Be sure to use gentle pressure-- do not move rapidly, and do not press down hard. Let the shaver do the work for you. If you have to press down hard, your shaver may be dirty, and/or your blades may be too dull and need to be replaced.

Hints for Sensitive Skin

If you have sensitive skin, you may wish to shave the more sensitive areas of your face and neck first, and finish with the less sensitive areas. This is because some electric shavers generate heat over the course of your shave, and heat can cause irritation. Shave sensitive areas while the shaver is still cool.

Finishing Up

When you are finished, if there is any pre-shave lotion remaining, rinse your face with warm water, then cool water. Pat your face dry (don't rub) and apply an after-shave balm or moisturizer to smooth the skin. As with wet shaving, avoid alcohol-based after-shaves, and instead look for products designed to soothe and moisturize your skin without clogging your pores.

ELECTRIC SHAVER MAINTENANCE

Don't throw away the manual!

Take the time to read your shaver manual regarding its proper use, upkeep, and maintenance. Below are some general tips for proper shaver maintenance; however, these should not replace the tips given in the manual for your specific model.

Clean your shaver's screen and cutter regularly

On most shavers you can lift off the head frame which holds the screen in order to brush out any whisker residue. The shaver should come with a cleaning brush designed for this purpose. The cutter, located below the screen, is the area you need to brush out. Do not touch the screen itself with the brush; it is very fragile. It is best to clean your shaver at least every third shave, preferably more frequently. You can also use a specialized cleaning solution as recommended by the manufacturer for a really thorough cleaning.

The screen and cutter need lubrication

Spray a lubricant (there are plenty designed and recommended by shaver manufacturers) on the shaving screen while the shaver is running. This will free up any metal-to-metal binding that may be impeding the shaver's effectiveness. Use the lubricant sparingly, and apply as directed by the manufacturer. It is best to lubricate the cutter just before you shave. You don't need to wipe off excess lubricant.

Changing your foil and cutter

Most foil and cutter sets need to be changed about once per year; sooner if you have a tough beard or if you don't clean out and lubricate your shaver frequently enough. Change the foil and cutter at the same time. As your cutter gets duller, your foil gradually gets thinner as well. Installing a new, sharp cutter under a thinning foil can break a hole in the foil, and you could possibly be cut.

STRAIGHT RAZORS

The straight razor is constructed of a long, hardened steel blade attached to a handle by means of a pivot. The handle is typically made of hard rubber, plastic, or bone. You may have seen one in your old-style local barbershop, or in an old movie—or perhaps you know someone who uses one on a regular basis.

A straight razor is a classic shaving implement, and one that is not as commonly used since the invention of the safety razor. However, some men still enjoy shaving with a straight razor, and so can you if you are so inclined to do a little research on straight razor care and technique.

One advantage of a straight razor is that, if properly cared for, the blade can last for generations. Unlike disposable blades, which we simply throw away after a few shaves when they become too dull to use, straight razors are frequently "stropped" and periodically "honed" to maintain their sharp cutting edge. If you choose a straight razor, you should be prepared to spend some quality time maintaining it in order to get an effective shave.

When shopping for a straight razor, you should look for a shop that deals with high quality shaving equipment and/or high quality knives. Ideally, find a shop where the salespeople actually use the products they sell, so that they can provide you with quality advice on using and maintaining your razor.

For your first straight razor, it is probably best to avoid buying the most expensive model (in case you give up on the whole thing). Nor is it wise to buy the cheapest model (a poor quality razor can keep you from getting a good shave and enjoying the experience). Buy a razor that balances quality and price. Discuss with your salesperson which choice might be best for you and your beard-type.

Important points to consider with your salesperson when buying a straight razor are:

Balance

The balance refers to the relative weight and length of the blade as compared with that of the handle. A straight razor is properly balanced when the weight of the blade is equal to that of the handle.

Temper

Tempering the razor involves a heat treatment imparted to the blade during its manufacture. Razors can be purchased with either a hard, soft, or medium temper, each with its own set of pros and cons.

Size

The size of the razor refers to the length and width of the blade.

Grind

The grind of a razor refers to the shape of the blade. There are two basic types of grind: the concave grind and the wedge grind.

Finish

The finish of a razor is the condition of its surface, which may be either plain steel, crocus (polished steel) or metal plated (nickel or silver). The crocus finish usually lasts longer and shows the least rust of the three.

Style

The style simply refers to the overall design and look of the razor.

In addition to purchasing the straight razor itself, you must also buy a few additional items in order to maintain the blade:

Strop

All straight razors require daily stropping before and after use to straighten and re-align their edge. Individuals with coarse beards may also need to strop their razors during a shaving session. Stropping involves passing the blade in a back-and-forth motion over a strop, which is usually made of leather. Strops come in both belt and paddle styles. Belts often have a leather side and a linen/cotton side, while paddles can have 2, 3, or 4 sides.

Strop Paste

Strop paste is a leather conditioner that is used to protect and condition the leather strop, while improving stropping by causing additional drag on the razor. There are several strop pastes available, usually in different colors, and each has a different purpose. When choosing your stop, discuss with the salesperson which strop paste is right for you.

Hone

Even with daily stropping, all razors lose their edge over time. To replace the edge you will need to periodically hone your razor. Honing re-establishes the fine edge of the razor by actually removing some of the metal from the razor (as opposed to stropping, which simply reshapes the edge). Ask your salesperson for a recommendation on how often you should hone the razor you choose. As a general rule, you should hone your razor when it starts to drag on your face, even after you have stropped it properly. Always use a hone specifically designed for razors (not for kitchen or hunting knives), with a minimum of 6,000 grit (8,000-10,000 is preferred).

Consult with your salesperson or an experienced straight razor user on proper stropping and honing techniques. A traditional barbershop textbook may also provide detailed examples of honing techniques.

For online guides to use and care of your straight razor, including stropping and honing techniques, check the following sites:
www.en.NassRasur.com/razorcentral/index.html (this one has really extensive instructions)
www.classicshaving.citymax.com
premiumknives.com/ShopSite/Shaving_Razors_and_stropes_and_Shaving_Accessories.html
(click on the "Straight Razors" section)
www.gentlemans-shop.com
www.knifecenter.com/knifecenter/sharpen/instrazor.html

The following is a link to a yahoo groups site for straight razor users:
health.groups.yahoo.com/group/straightrazorplace

Straight Razor Care

In addition to stropping and honing, care should be taken to prevent corrosion from forming on the razor. With this in mind, you should rinse your razor after each use and allow it to thoroughly air dry before putting it away. Keep the blade lubricated with a light grade oil after each shaving session.

Straight razor shaving tips

All of the advice provided in the "wet shaving" section applies to the straight razor section as well. However, there are a few techniques specific to straight razor shaving that are described below.

Many men report they get the best results with a straight razor used in combination with a traditional shaving brush and a glycerin-based shave soap. ([Click here for more information on the use of shave brushes and shave soap.](#))

Once you have prepped your face and beard in the manner described in the "wet shaving" section, open your razor to 270 degrees, so the handle is pointed up and the blade edge is pointed down. This position allows for good control while shaving. Run the blade under hot water just before use. Begin with the side-burns and cheeks, then the neck, then the upper lip and chin.

One of the great benefits of a straight razor is that you can adjust the blade angle for different parts of the beard and face. When you are first starting to shave with a straight razor, begin with a more forgiving blade angle of around 90 degrees against the skin. Once you have learned to handle the razor adeptly, you may try more aggressive angles, up to about 30 degrees. The razor should glide smoothly over your face. Rinse the razor under hot running water frequently to remove oil, soap and hair.

Be careful to never move the razor in a cutting motion parallel to the blade edge; you will cut yourself. Also be careful to not hit your razor on the sink as this could permanently damage the razor's edge.

WET SHAVING TOOLS

Disposable razors

A major advantage to disposables is that they are convenient and readily available. One drawback is they involve a lot of waste-- either the entire razor is thrown away in the case of one-piece disposables, or the cartridges are thrown away in the case of disposables where you keep the razor handle. Plus, cartridges tend to be more expensive than buying individual blades. If you've found a specific brand that works well for you, by all means stick to it. However, if you are considering costs over a lifetime of use, a quality double-edged safety razor with replaceable blades might save you money in the long run.

Double-Edge (Non-disposable) Safety Razors

The double-edge safety razor is a great value among wet shavers. This type of shaver has a sturdy handle and a shave head that are typically made of metal. The user can open the metal head and insert a new double-edged replacement blade once the old one has become dull. Replacement blades are inexpensive, easy to find, and provide two shaving edges per blade, so they last twice as long. These razors provide a clean, close shave, and if properly cared for, there is no reason why a well-made safety razor shouldn't last a lifetime.

Straight razor

See the [previous section](#) for details on the straight razor.

Shave brushes

The shave brush is an important part of the shaving process that has been left behind by many over time, but it is a wonderful tool for preparing the face for shaving.

The best quality shave brushes are made from 100% badger hair. Badger hair is very fibrous and retains a large volume of water, which is key to producing a warm, rich and lubricating lather for an exceptional shave. Shave brushes are also made of synthetic fibers (the least expensive and least effective), boar bristle (better than synthetic, not as good as badger), or synthetic/natural blends, but badger hair works the best of them all. Badger hair brushes are then graded into three categories: Pure badger (least expensive of the badgers), Best badger (more expensive than Pure badger), and Silvertip badger or "Super badger" (most expensive of all).

If cared for properly, shave brushes should last many years, so it may be wise to invest in a Pure badger brush (\$20-\$80) as it will perform well for some time. If your budget constrains you from being able to go with a badger brush, Boar bristle brushes tend to be comparable in price to synthetic brushes, but usually far outperform them.

Shave brushes are usually used in combination with a glycerin-based shave soap and a shave mug (see below), though you can use them with shave creams as well. To work a shave soap into a lather inside your shave mug, first drench the brush bristles with warm water. Brush the shave soap in a circular, whisking motion with the shave brush until a rich lather forms. Do not press down on the bristles, as this may damage the brush-- simply move in quick circular motions.

The lather you create with a shave brush and shave soap will not be a thick like the foam that comes out of a shaving cream can. It will be a thinner, yet rich lather. If you seem to be getting what looks like bubble water, you either haven't worked the lather enough, or you added a bit too much water. Experiment until you produce a good lather.

Use the brush to apply the lather to your beard in small, gentle, circular motions, or in gentle painting motions. Do not press the bristles hard against your face, as this could damage the brush. The action of the brush helps lift the hairs while laying down a slippery barrier of lather. This barrier reduces razor drag and skippage. You can renew the lather on your face while shaving by simply reworking the lather with the shave brush.

Always rinse your brush well under warm water after each use and gently flick out the excess water. Stand the brush upright in a dry environment or place it on a shave brush stand, allowing it to air dry fully after each use. Never put a wet shave brush in an enclosed place. A very basic brush stand costs about \$4-5, and will keep your brush in good condition for years to come.

Shave soaps

A good shave soap can used along with a shave brush make a difference in the feel and closeness of your shave. A basic, glycerin-based shave soap will generate a rich, slippery lather for a close shave, and has a few other virtues as well: it is biodegradable and there is no canister to discard nor propellants released into the air. Shave soaps also tend to be inexpensive.

Shave soaps look like ordinary soap (white or colored) in the shape of a hockey puck. Some shave soaps come in their own special bowl-like containers, but it is usually less messy to use a shave soap and brush with a shave mug.

Shave mugs

Shave mugs look like ordinary mugs except they are larger overall, and wider at their opening than at the bottom. This allows for room to put the shave soap in the bottom of the mug, as well as room to whip the soap into a lather with your shave brush.

SHAVING-RELATED LINKS

Sites with excellent shaving informaion, in addition to selling shaving products:

www.classicshaving.citymax.com
premiumknives.com/ShopSite/Shaving_Razors_and_stropes_and_Shaving_Accessories.html
www.gentlemans-shop.com
www.vintagebladesllc.com

Extensive information on straight razors and wet shaving:

www.en.NassRasur.com/razorcentral/index.html

Site providing basic information on shaving history and technique:

www.e-shaving.com

Site with numerous hard-to-find men's classic toiletries and shaving supplies:

www.e-barbershop.com

Sites selling classic and contemporary shaving products:

www.coolshaving.com
www.amazingshaving.com
www.shaveshop.com
www.shavingsupplies.com
www.nashvilleknifeshop.com

Sells men's skin care products, but also offers advice columns on grooming:

www.menessentials.com

Bump Fighter Shaving System on Greatrazors.com:

greatrazors.zoovy.com/category/mensbumpfighter

Bumphree product site (razor bumps):
www.bumphree.com