

Facial hair FAQ for FTMs

Will I be able to grow a beard or mustache?

The answer to this question appears to depend mainly on your genetic makeup (i.e., the tendencies for growing facial hair that you were born with) and how long you have been on testosterone therapy. This mirrors the process that non-trans men go through when growing facial hair-- it depends on their individual tendencies for growing facial hair, as well as the length of time that has passed since they began growing facial hair during puberty.

Regarding the genetic component, there is considerable variance in both the developmental pace and the quantity that different men are able to grow facial hair. Some men grow thick facial hair in a relatively short period of time after reaching puberty or starting testosterone therapy, while others may never be able to grow a full beard or mustache in their lifetime. Some men grow substantial facial hair only in certain areas (such as the sideburns or chin), but are unable to ever grow a full mustache or grow more than a few hairs on their cheeks. Some may notice patchy or bald areas in an otherwise full beard, or sideburns that never grow in fully. These varying developmental patterns seem to be largely related to inherited traits-- though keep in mind that a guy may not be able to accurately predict his own facial hair growth based on that of his male relatives. Just because a man's dad or brother grows a thick beard or mustache doesn't necessarily mean that his own facial hair growth will be the same.

Regarding the length of time on testosterone therapy, there will be some variance depending on the individual, but generally facial hair tends to thicken and develop over a period of years rather than over just a few months. This is similar to any man who has gone through puberty-- typically, some facial hair begins to develop in the early months of puberty, but it often takes a number of years to begin to grow facial hair in a pattern substantial enough to grow a full beard or a full mustache. Some men begin with only sparse facial hair in their teens and early twenties, but find that their beards have thickened and filled out by their late twenties or early thirties. There are individuals who grow facial hair quickly and densely, but most guys develop over time. For those who have been on testosterone for only a short time, patience is key when trying to grow a beard-- it may take several years.

Will shaving my face make my beard grow in thicker or faster?

No, shaving will not make your facial hair grow in any thicker or faster, though it may feel that way.

There are a couple of reasons why your hair might feel like it is growing in thicker after shaving. First, hair tends to be thicker and darker near the root and becomes thinner/wispier near the end of the hair as it grows out. When you shave a hair, you are cutting it close to the thicker root end, creating a much shorter hair with a sharper edge close to the skin's surface. This leaves a stiffer "stubble" effect when you rub your face in the day or two following your shave. Once the hair grows out, it will begin to feel softer again.

There are a lot of people who swear that shaving their hair causes it to grow in thicker, darker, and faster. However, if this were true, wouldn't every man, woman, or boy who shaved his or her face be able to grow a full beard? Many men shave each day *precisely because* their facial hair is patchy and they cannot grow a full beard! If the myth about shaving causing beard growth were true, all people who shave their faces regularly would soon develop full beards, and that is simply not the case.

Will facial hair dye make my facial hair appear thicker/denser?

Using facial hair dye to try to make your facial hair look thicker/denser might work if you already have some substantial growth, but if your facial hair is still very thin and wispy, coloring it probably won't be very effective. You can certainly color thin, wispy hairs, but in general this will not produce the look of an adult beard or mustache. It may create a shadowy look on your upper lip or cheeks, like a teenage boy who has just started to grow facial hair. If the hair is very fine, the color won't take well and will be barely visible.

If you have started to grow numerous thick whiskers, but some of them are coming in blonde, then using a facial hair dye might help help make your hair appear more dense. If you choose to dye your facial hair, use a product that has been designed specifically for use on the face (such as "Just for Men" for mustache, beard, and sideburns or a similar product), and follow all directions on the package to avoid allergic reactions or rashes. Also, choose a color that is similar to the facial hair you already have, or to the hair color on your head.

In general, dyeing your facial hair is only worthwhile if it will enhance the substantial growth you already have; it might end up looking worse or unnatural if your hair is too fine and too sparse. If you are unsure of how dye will look, grow your facial hair out for a while, and then do a test run, following the directions for the product you have chosen. If the results do not look good or realistic, simply shave off the hair.

Will minoxidil (i.e., Rogaine) enhance my facial hair growth?

While minoxidil has been approved for increasing hair growth on the top of the head, it has not yet been marketed or tested specifically for facial hair growth. However, there have been anecdotal reports regarding increased beard growth with application of minoxidil (see the minoxidil discussion on the [Beard Board](#) for details). When considering anecdotal reports about minoxidil use on facial hair, it should be noted that FTMs who are not on testosterone therapy would probably not show comparable results to post-pubescent non-trans men or FTMs who have been taking testosterone for some time. It should also be noted that anecdotal reports are not the same as clinical medical evidence, and thus the reader should proceed with caution and speak to their doctor for specific medical advice.

The exact process by which minoxidil causes its results is not fully understood, but it has been shown to stimulate head and body hair growth in some people. Women who use minoxidil for scalp hair loss are cautioned to avoid application to the face in order to avoid unwanted facial hair growth; this would indicate that increased facial hair growth via topical minoxidil is indeed possible, though to what degree (i.e., how much hair growth, and the thickness and quality of the new hair) remains largely unstudied.

Minoxidil was first used in tablet form as the drug "Loniten," an antihypertensive, to treat high blood pressure. An unexpected side effect of Loniten was that some patients experienced excessive hair growth. As a result, a topical solution of minoxidil was developed for application directly on the scalp to stimulate hair growth. This product is marketed in the United States as "Rogaine," though it can also be obtained under other names and as a generic. It typically comes in 2% and 5% solution, usually in a lotion form. Topical minoxidil does not require a prescription; it can be purchased over the counter in many drugstores.

When used on the scalp, minoxidil requires twice-a-day application, and it may take from 3 to 6 months for the user to see an effect. Again, minoxidil is not approved for use on the face, so it is unclear if the dosing for the scalp is appropriate for use on the face. It stands to reason that results from minoxidil would probably take at least several months of continued application. Caution should be exercised when using any medication, and questions or concerns should be directed to your doctor or dermatologist.

Another word of caution for those considering minoxidil for facial hair growth: there have been anecdotal reports of additional hair growth in places other than where the drug was applied, such as the chest, back, abdomen, and unusual facial hair growth by some users (i.e., very high on the cheeks just under the eyes). Some of this growth can continue well after discontinuation of minoxidil. If these risks are a concern, you may not wish to use minoxidil.

Common side effects of minoxidil include skin irritation, itch, contact dermatitis, hives, swelling, and sensitivity. Rare side effects include blurred vision, chest pain, decreased libido, difficulty in maintaining an erection, fast or irregular heartbeat, flushing, headache, lightheadedness, numbness or tingling of the hands, feet, or face, or rapid weight gain.

What about using things like fake facial hair, makeup, or theatrical techniques?

Using fake facial hair or makeup to create a realistic-looking beard, mustache, and/or sideburns can be a very difficult and/or expensive project. While you may be able to create facial hair that looks good from a distance, it may be far less convincing up close, or when touched.

Using makeup to create the look of a five o'clock shadow or sideburns, or to enhance the thickness of existing facial hair, can be easily detected at close range. Makeup also can be worn off from sweat or oils, and can be smudged or rubbed off when touched.

Fake theatrical paste-on beards and mustaches can be found in costume shops, but are usually not very realistic. More expensive facial hair pieces that are made of real human hair (usually woven onto some type of fine lace backing that is to be glued to the face) can still be detected upon close inspection, and also don't tend to feel realistic.

Some theatrical makeup artists create more realistic looking facial hair by cutting fake hair (usually purchased in braid form) into individual whisker- or stubble-length pieces, and then attaching those loose pieces to the face with an adhesive called "spirit gum." For extra realism, sometimes more than one color of fake hair whiskers are mixed together. Using this process, it can take hours to create a convincing look, depending on the style you are applying. Additionally, quality hair, adhesive, and adhesive remover can be quite expensive. While this method may create a better result than a one-piece paste-on, it still is not very realistic to the touch (the glue can be tacky even after drying), the hairs can easily fall off or be rubbed off, and it can be difficult to continue to re-create the same pattern day after day.

Finally, there are logistical issues to consider. If you suddenly appear one day with a full mustache or beard after having very little facial hair, people will wonder where it came from! Additionally, if you wish to be taken seriously as a guy, wearing obviously fake facial hair will probably have the opposite effect that you are hoping for.

In general, while it may be fun to try out these techniques at home or for theatrical purposes, fake facial hair takes a lot of effort and tends not to look or feel realistic for everyday purposes. Give your hair some time to grow in by itself. Be patient, and if all else fails, remember that many guys simply don't tend to grow full beards.