

# Health

## ***Faculty Column: Ask the school nurse***

by **Susan Martin**  
Contributor

Dear Nurse

*I have an unusual problem and wanted to ask your advice and help. Is it normal to have hair everywhere when I am a girl? I am embarrassed to ask anyone else, so thought I would write to you for an answer and advice in knowing what to do.*

Signed,  
Embarrassed

Dear Embarrassed,

It would be wonderful if you did not feel embarrassed to be who you are. You are not alone in your worries and the medical term for this condition is hirsutism. This means that you are growing hair in areas where men more normally grow hair. This does not mean that you are not feminine. Both men and women have both male (testosterone and androgen) and female (estrogen and progesterone) hormones to differing degrees. Too many of the male hormones or extra-sensitivity to them will cause you to grow the hair that you are worried about. This is a medical condition and there are treatments and medications you can take to help with this issue.

Some of the medical conditions that cause this are:

- Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)

which increases androgen production

- Cushing's Syndrome, an adrenal gland dysfunction that increases androgen

- Tumors of the ovaries causing increased androgen production

- Anorexia Nervosa, an Eating Disorder

- Hypothyroidism, which is an underactive thyroid gland

Several medications can also cause hirsutism. Some of these are:

- Medications containing testosterone

- Medications used to treat endometriosis or fibrocystic breast disease

- Anabolic steroids used by athletes to "bulk up"

- Antifungal agents such as metronidazole

- Anti-inflammatory drugs such as corticosteroids

- Phenytoin, used as an anti-seizure medication

- Oral medication used to control Diabetes, such as diazoxide

- Minoxidil, which is used to treat high blood pressure

Since this is a concern to you, I would recommend that you see your health care provider either here on campus or in the community. You can discuss your concerns and find out if you have a medical condition that is causing this, or if you are taking a medication that has hirsutism

as a side-effect. I hope that knowing that this is a medical condition will make you more able to talk to a professional about your concerns. You will most likely need a physical examination and some lab work to find out the cause.

Just in case you are also interested in hair removal, there are several ways this can be accomplished. There are products made specially to bleach hair in unwanted areas. Shaving is short term but may cause the hair to become coarser. Other choices:

- Chemical hair removal
- Waxing
- Plucking
- Electrolysis
- Laser hair removal

Once you have seen a physician and ruled out serious health care problems, then you may decide that having hair on your chest or abdomen is just you—and that is okay. It is a good thing to have both male and female characteristics. This allows women to be more assertive and to stand up for themselves in perhaps risky situations, and it allows men to be more gentle and nurturing. I celebrate our differences and I hope you will too. (research done in Go Ask Alice [alice@columbia.edu](mailto:alice@columbia.edu).)

I encourage you to come by the Health Clinic for illnesses or just to talk about your concerns. All information we discuss is confidential. The Clinic is located at 17 Alumni Drive at the corner of French Broad Street. The hours are 8-4:30 PM Monday through Friday and I am on call 24/7(884-8244). The doctors are here on Monday between 12 and 1 PM and Friday between 8-9 AM for diagnosis and prescribing. All services provided by the nurse or physicians at the Clinic are provided at no further cost.

*This is a column that will appear regularly in the Clarion. You may either email me at [martinse@brevard.edu](mailto:martinse@brevard.edu), or drop a letter in the campus mail if you choose to remain anonymous. Your name will not appear in the Clarion. I hope your questions will be serious and that you will send them in so that we, as a community can learn together about medical issues. I research each question and take this responsibility seriously. My answers are not meant to be complete, but I hope you will follow up and learn more with me. Susan Martin, RN*

### Comic by Dabney Farmer

