

Smooth operator

Fed up of having your skin sandpapered off by your man's stubble? For a silkier touch, just get him to follow our five steps to facial defuzzing...

1. Soak first

Washing your face and neck with warm water and mild soap will help remove natural oils and perspiration, which stop water from penetrating your skin. It takes about two minutes of soaking to reach optimal beard softening for a comfortable shave. Beard hair can be as tough as copper wire, but applying warm water causes the hair to expand, making it softer and easier to cut.

2. Lather up

Although water is the essential softening agent, it's absorbed by the hair and quickly evaporates, leaving the hair in its original rigid state. Shaving cream or gel provides a protective blanket, which prevents water evaporation and keeps the beard soft while shaving. Apply plenty of it, as the lubricating action of creams and gels reduces friction between the blade and your skin, making for a smoother shaving experience.

3. Go easy

When shaving, use light, gentle strokes – in the direction of the whiskers' growth – for a closer shave (shaving in both directions is not recommended). Rinse your razor often to prevent a build-up of hairs and cream on the blade edges and in the cartridge. A fresh twin or triple-bladed razor will give you an even closer shave. New blades help prevent cuts and irritation, giving you a smoother, more comfortable shave.

4. Save the worst for last

Shave your cheeks, the sides of your face and the neck before starting on those hard-to-shave spots. The toughest whiskers grow on the chin and around the lips, so leaving them until last allows them to soak in the shaving cream for longer, making them softer.

5. After the shave

Once you've shaved, rinse your face and neck with cool water and pat dry. Apply aftershave balm, especially if your skin is prone to irritation. Rinse the razor blade thoroughly and shake off any excess water before storing. Do not wipe the blade, as this will damage the fine shaving edge.

How to prevent those nasty nicks

If you don't want your face covered in toilet paper...

- Take your time. Shaving in a hurry is the most common cause of nicks.
- Don't shave over visible scabs, spots or blemishes, as you'll only reopen the wound and make them bleed. However, many facial bumps and pimples are invisible to the eye, so some bleeding is to be expected.
- If you do get a nasty nick, apply a styptic pencil, available from your pharmacist, to stem the blood flow and disinfect the skin.
- Aftershave also helps stop the blood from flowing, but avoid solutions containing alcohol – it stings!

Did you know?

- Shaving has been around for centuries. The Ancient Egyptians were using razors made of copper and gold as far back as 4,000BC.
- In an average lifetime, a man will spend around 3,350 hours shaving off about 8.38m 27.5ft of hair.
- A man's beard grows about 14cm (5.5in) a year.
- Curly-haired men suffer most from ingrown hairs.