If nicks, scrapes, ingrown hairs, red bumps, and razor burn are irritating you, it's time to learn the secrets to a naturally perfect shave—and improve your skin in the process. Here are some steps to success:

1. **Work with water.** Open up the pores and soften the beard with lots of warm water, which expands hair follicles. As follicles swell, they get weaker and less resistant to the cutting action of a blade. Splash your face for at least two minutes or let steam from the shower soften the stubble.

2. **Stay calm.** Ditch the old bar soaps, which often contain harsh synthetic detergents and fragrances. The detergents strip away the skin's mantle and loosen its protective keratin proteins, making it vulnerable to irritation and infection. Instead, choose a coconut oil–based cleanser that breaks down grease and oils from the sebaceous glands.

3. **Get a little rough.** Several times a week, spend a few minutes working a granular facial scrub made from almond meal, jojoba beads, or oatmeal flakes into the skin in circular motions. Scrubs lift the hair shafts and exfoliate dead skin, helping prevent ingrown hairs. Scrubs also gently buff away pollutants and other build up that causes razor drag.

4. **Shave face.** While skin is still wet, apply a gentle shaving cream that moisturizes the skin and helps the razor glide. Beware of aerosol shaving foams—they are propelled by chemicals that dry skin. Be sure to shave in the direction of the hair growth to reduce irritation.

5. **Tone it down.** That thin layer of skin you scraped off during shaving tends to leave your face particularly vulnerable to sun and wind. Protect it by splashing on a skin toner as an after shave to help restore your skin's pH balance. Look for a toner containing witch hazel (such as Humphrey’s Original Witch Hazel Astringent) rather than alcohol, which dries skin, and lavender or tea tree oil, both natural antiseptics. +

**it's a guy thing**

Give your daily shaving and skin care routine a face-lift with the help of a few simple changes (and some great products too)

By Sherrie Strausfogel
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