

Laser Hair Removal, Explained

How it works, why we use the Soprano ICE Platinum, and what to expect at TopOne Hair & Beauty Salon, Richmond.



Our Soprano ICE Platinum by Alma Lasers, in the treatment room at TopOne, Richmond.

1. What laser hair removal actually does

Every hair grows from a follicle under the skin. Two parts of the follicle, the bulb at its base and the bulge a little higher up, are what make the hair regrow. Laser hair removal sends light into the skin, where it is absorbed by the pigment (melanin) in the hair. The light turns into heat, the hair carries that heat down to the bulb and bulge, and at around 45 to 50 °C those structures are damaged enough to slow or stop new growth. The surrounding skin absorbs far less of the light, which is what makes the treatment selective: it targets the hair, not the skin around it.

Because the laser needs pigment to work on, it is most effective on hair that has colour. Very light blonde, red, grey or white hair contains little melanin and responds less predictably. We will tell you honestly what to expect at your consultation.

Lasers have been used for hair removal since the 1990s. The result they are approved for is called permanent hair *reduction*: a long-term, stable drop in the number of hairs that grow back after a course. That is the honest way to describe it, and it is what we aim for.

2. Why it takes a course of sessions

Hair does not all grow at once. At any moment, some follicles are actively growing, some are resting and

some are shedding. The laser only affects follicles in the active growth phase, so one session can only treat the hairs that happen to be growing that day.

That is why treatment is planned as a course, usually six to eight sessions or more. Each visit catches a different set of follicles. Over the course, regrowth becomes sparser, finer and slower.

Area Sessions 1 to 4 Sessions 4 to 8

Face Every 4 weeks Every 4 to 6 weeks

Body Every 6 weeks Every 6 to 8 weeks

What to expect from a course. After six sessions, clients who respond well typically see a 60 to 90 % reduction in hair. The hair that remains is finer, lighter and slower to grow. Facial hair usually needs more sessions because it is driven by hormones, and very fine hair can take longer too. Most clients book a top-up every six to twelve months to keep the result. A small number of people respond less than expected, and no laser can promise complete clearance, so we review your progress at every visit.

3. Why we chose the Soprano ICE Platinum

The Soprano ICE Platinum is a medical-grade laser made by Alma Lasers, the latest generation of a system that has been refined for more than fifteen years. It is cleared by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for all six skin types, from very fair to deeply pigmented, and for tanned skin, which few other lasers can claim. We chose it because it solves the three things that make laser hair removal uncomfortable or limited on older machines.

Three wavelengths in one handpiece

Most lasers use a single wavelength of light, which suits some skin and hair types but not others. The Soprano ICE Platinum combines three at once:

Wavelength	Best known for	Typical areas
Alexandrite (755 nm)	Strongest absorption by pigment, works on shallower follicles and finer hair.	Upper lip, eyebrows, chest and back
Diode (810 nm)	The all-rounder: good depth, works on most skin and hair types.	Legs, arms, beard, cheeks
Nd:YAG (1064 nm)	Reaches the deepest follicles and is the safest on darker and tanned skin.	Underarms, bikini line, scalp

Follicles sit at different depths depending on the area: about 1 to 2.5 mm on the upper lip, up to 5 mm in the underarm and bikini area. Delivering all three wavelengths together means one treatment reaches every depth and suits every skin tone.

In-motion technique (SHR)

Older lasers fire one strong pulse at a time, which is where the "snapping" pain comes from. The Soprano handpiece glides continuously over the area instead, delivering about ten low-energy pulses a second. The follicle is warmed gradually to the 45 to 50 °C that damages it, rather than being hit with one sharp burst. Clients describe it as a warm, pulsing sensation, and the gliding motion gives even coverage with no missed patches. This is the method clinical studies have found to be as effective as traditional lasers, with less pain and a better safety record on darker skin.

ICE cooling

The tip of the handpiece is a cooled sapphire crystal that stays in contact with your skin. It keeps the skin surface at around 25 °C while the follicle underneath reaches 50 °C. This is the main reason the treatment is described as virtually painless, and why some clients find it relaxing enough to doze off.

Different modes for different areas

- **SHR in-motion:** fast, even treatment of larger areas such as legs, arms and back.
- **SHR Stack:** several pulses stacked on a smaller area for sensitive zones such as the face and bikini line.
- **HR Classic:** a single focused pulse for precise spots.
- **Facial tip:** a one-centimetre adaptor for very small areas such as between the brows, the nostrils and the earlobes.

4. What happens at TopOne

Step	What we do
Consultation	We go through your medical history, how you currently remove hair, whether you get ingrown hairs, and what you want from the treatment. We check the area, the colour and type of your hair, and record your skin type on the Fitzpatrick scale (I, very fair, to VI, deeply pigmented), which sets the energy we use. You sign a consent form before anything is treated.
Patch test	A small area is treated at least 48 hours before your first session to check how your skin reacts and to find the setting that is comfortable for you. We test every area you intend to have treated. If you are a regular client, a new patch test is only needed after six months away or if your health or medication has changed.
Preparation	Shave the area 12 to 24 hours before. Do not wax, pluck, thread or epilate, because that removes the hair the laser needs to target. Arrive with clean skin: no lotion, deodorant, make-up, perfume or self-tan on the area. We set the machine to your skin type, hair

colour, thickness and stage of treatment.

Marking up	Larger areas are divided into hand-sized sections with a white pencil. The machine counts the energy delivered to each section, so every part of the area receives the same, measured dose.
Gel and eyewear	You and your therapist wear protective eyewear. A cool, clear gel is applied so the handpiece glides smoothly and the skin surface is protected.
Treatment	The handpiece moves section by section across the area, always in contact with the skin and always moving. You feel warmth pulsing on the skin. If anything feels uncomfortable, tell your therapist: the energy is adjusted straight away and the cooled tip can be rested on the area. Your comfort is the guide we work to.
Clean and finish	The gel is wiped away and a soothing aloe vera gel or lotion is applied to calm the skin. We record the settings used so your next session builds on this one.

5. Before you book: things to tell us

Laser is safe for most people, but some conditions mean we cannot treat you, or need to adjust how we do. Please tell us at your consultation if any of these apply.

We cannot treat you if you

are pregnant

take medication or herbal remedies that make skin sensitive to light (some antibiotics, acne treatments and St John's Wort, for example)

have a history of cancer, in particular skin cancer

have an active cold sore or other infection in the area

have a history of keloid scarring, lupus, insulin-dependent diabetes or light-sensitive epilepsy

have eczema, psoriasis, vitiligo, a tattoo or

We may need to adjust or wait if you

are breastfeeding, have a hormonal condition such as PCOS (results take longer and need maintenance), or have sensitive skin or a tendency to pigmentation

have active acne or an implanted medical device

have had fillers, Botox, a peel or microdermabrasion on the area in the last two to four weeks, or until the skin has fully healed

have a tan. UK practice is to avoid sun, sunbeds and self-tan on the area for two weeks before and two weeks after each session, even though the Soprano can treat tanned skin

permanent make-up on the area, or
melasma on the face

6. Looking after your skin afterwards

- Expect the area to feel warm and look slightly pink or a little swollen around the follicles for a few hours. This settles on its own. Aloe vera gel and a cool pack help if you want them.
- Avoid hot baths, saunas, steam, sunbeds, heavy exercise and tight clothing on the area for 48 hours.
- Keep the area out of direct sun for two weeks, and use a broad-spectrum SPF 30 or higher on any treated skin that is exposed.
- Use a mild deodorant for 24 hours after underarm treatment, and skip perfumed products on the area for a day.
- Do not wax, pluck, thread or epilate between sessions. Shaving is fine.
- Treated hairs often shed over the following two to four weeks. This is normal and is the treatment working. Gentle exfoliation helps them along.

7. Common questions

Does it hurt? Most clients describe brief warmth rather than pain. The cooled tip and gradual heating are designed for comfort, and settings are adjusted to you.

Can I have it done in summer? Yes. The Soprano ICE Platinum is cleared to treat tanned and darker skin, so treatment is possible year-round. We still ask you to keep the area out of the sun for two weeks either side of a session, so plan around holidays.

Is it safe for darker skin? Yes. The Soprano is one of very few lasers cleared for skin types V and VI. We use the Nd:YAG wavelength and lower energy, which means a session takes slightly longer, not that it works less well.

How long does a session take? From a few minutes for a small facial area to around an hour for full legs. The 2 cm handpiece covers large areas in about half the time of older systems.

Is it permanent? The result is long-term hair reduction. After a full course most clients see a 60 to 90 % reduction, with a top-up every six to twelve months to maintain it.

Who cannot have laser? See section 5. Pregnancy, certain medications and some skin conditions rule it out or need a doctor's approval. Please tell us about your health and any medication; it is covered at your consultation and patch test.

Book a consultation and patch test

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Open Tuesday to Saturday, 10:00 to 19:00

This guide is general information about laser hair removal and the equipment we use. It is not medical advice. Individual results vary with hair colour, skin type and hormones, and a consultation and patch test are required before any treatment. Technical details are from Alma Lasers' Soprano training material.