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Cutting it close

Guys, you've been shaving all wrong. Here's the right way

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BY LISA IRIZARRY

Star-Ledger Staff

If there's anyone who wonders why we're still stuck with the unshaven look made famous by Don Johnson in the '80s TV show "Miami Vice," it's because he did something for men that no one else had been able to do.

Overnight he sold the world a bill of goods that facial stubble was a "fashion statement" to be honored whether a guy is in sweats or the finest tux. And he had a huge audience more than ready to buy -- virtually the whole male universe.

Let's face it. Men hate to shave, and they're going to ride the stubble train for as long as they can. But those left at the station can keep their chins up. Barbers and other experts say that most men who have a hate/hate relationship with shaving only feel that way because they don't know how to do it.

"They hate to shave because of the fact that they're doing it incorrectly," says Michael Felton, the master barber for The Art of Shaving shops and barber spas, which has a location in The Pier at Caesars in Atlantic City. "That's the reason they suffer so much discomfort."

A lot of men don't even know that nicks aren't a given in shaving, and that cuts are often caused by dull razors. Blades should be changed every five days.

The perfect shave, the experts say, is a wet shave. If you have to use an electric shaver for convenience, use one of the newer wet/dry shavers that are conducive to the four-part wet shave process.

To make the cut, follow these four basic steps: Prepare the skin, lather up, shave, and moisturize. (See the tip box.)

"No one taught us how to shave right -- it's not like back in the '30s," says Paul Kacsmar, the 42-year-old owner of Shaves Barbershop in Spring Lake.

Way back then, men regularly went to their barbers for a shave with a straight razor. The barber would use a hot towel beforehand to open the pores and a cold one afterward to close them.

These days, most guys learn how to shave from watching their fathers -- and end up learning some bad shaving habits.

It's not all Dad's fault. Your father's shaving cream wasn't all that good for his skin, and his after-shave was probably filled with skin-drying alcohol. What your face really needs after a shave is a moisturizer.

"My experience was, I was handed a razor and I watched my Dad shave, without me getting any kind of advice. I assumed my Dad's wrong way of shaving," says 31-year-old Dwight Schultheis. He is the co-founder of Amenity, a new line of men's skin care and shaving products based in Scotch Plains. (The products are available at the Avenue You store in Belmar, or call 1-888-357-7550).

Television and other advertising told men that the modern and convenient way to shave was to spray foam out of a can, lather up, shave. You were supposedly good to go after you splashed on an alcohol-based aftershave that stung.

Wrong.

Forget heavily fragranced foams and gels. A good shaving cream contains no chemicals and will not foam on its own, Kacsmar notes.

"You need one that has to be used with a brush to lather. It's basically soap," Kacsmar says. "Men are more concerned about skin care these days, so everybody's starting to use brushes again."

Synthetic fragrances and colors used in shaving foams also are irritating, especially for those with sensitive skin.

Follow your shave with an alcohol-free, moisturizing balm or gel. Kacsmar says it's also a good idea to have a washcloth on hand to wet with cold water for closing the pores.

"All the right steps are so important," he says. "You're basically shaving off a layer of skin every time you shave. Using one step or the other will get the result, but not the best result."

Style Tip:

Men: For shaving in the shower, try a fog-resistant mirror, available at Restoration Hardware stores, www.showertek.com and www.sharperimage.com.

Lisa Irizarry covers fashion. She may be reached at lirizarry@starledger.com or (973) 392-5977.

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