# Shaving pubes increases STI risk, UCSF study finds

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Not to hit below the belt, but the bald truth is if you shave yourself down there, you might be opening yourself to a sexually transmitted infection.

A [**new study by the University of California San Francisco**](http://sti.bmj.com/content/early/2016/10/31/sextrans-2016-052687.full) found that people who regularly groom their pubic hair are more likely to develop an STI than those who don't.

For women, the bare or well-trimmed look is more than a trend — it's the aesthetic standard. More than two out of three women (69 percent) now go completely pube-free, according a [**JAMA Dermatology report**](http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamadermatology/fullarticle/2529574) earlier this year. Another 13 percent do some landscaping, leaving about 16 percent who prefer a "natural" growth. Younger, college-educated women were the most likely to groom themselves.

The UCSF study in the journal "Sexually Transmitted Infections," surveyed grooming routines, sexual habits and STI history of 7,580 U.S. men and women aged 18-65. Sixty-six percent of the males reported regular pubic hair grooming compared to 84 percent of the females.

Extreme groomers were defined as those who removed all pubic air more than 11 times a year. High-frequency groomers trimmed daily or weekly. The extreme group was found to be 28 percent more likely to report STIs than the high-frequency group.

The study noted grooming is correlated to an increased number of lifetime sexual partners, which would heighten the risk of contracting an STI. For women, those to regularly groomed had twice the number of lifetime sex partners as those who didn't (9 vs. 4.4), according to the JAMA study.

But shaving as a preparatory activity for sex could also be a factor. Shaving can cause microtears in the the skin that could facilitate transmission of bacteria or viruses like human papillomavirus (HPV), the study said.

UCSF researchers concluded that herpes, HPV, syphilis and molluscum (MCV lesions) were more common among groomers after adjusting for age and number of lifetime sexual partners.

One medical benefit of going bare? It reduces the possibility of pubic lice.

Of the women who prune their pubic region, more than half (59 percent) said they did it for "hygienic purposes," according to the JAMA Dermatology report.

But there is no scientific evidence that going hairless is more hygienic than doing no trimming at all — as long as you bath regularly and change your underwear.