As skin care professionals, we know that shaving impacts skin health. Ingrown hairs, irritation and redness are just some of the visible signs of trauma your skin undergoes when you take a razor to it. If your male clients are suffering from these or any of the other problems that can go along with the not-so-simple act of shaving, you can help. Educate yourself on the three steps of shaving, and learn about beneficial products that both you and your male clients can use on their beards to calm redness and reduce irritation.

The Three Steps of Shaving

There are three important steps to the shaving routine: Pre-Shave, Shave and Post-Shave.

1. **Pre-Shave**
   The most important aspect of shaving is the Pre-Shave preparatory step. This step should prepare the beard and the skin for shaving while minimizing and preventing irritation, inflammation and nicks. Begin by thoroughly cleansing the skin, ridding it of excess oils that coat the beard and skin and eliminating any bacteria that could cause infection should the skin be cut. Where ingrown hairs are an issue, be sure to administer an exfoliant or scrub.

   The Pre-Shave step should not only prepare the beard for an adequate shave, it should protect the skin as well. The more the beard has been treated before meeting the razor’s edge, the easier it will be for the razor to slide over the skin. Wet shaving engorges the hair with water, softening it and reducing resistance to the blade, which reduces trauma to the skin as well.

2. **Shave**
   The next step is the actual Shave. A man may select a shave medium – an oil, cream or gel – based on personal preference, bearing in mind his beard type (coarse, fine, etc.) and skin condition (oily, sensitized, etc.). A man with oily skin may prefer a gel to a cream or oil, while a man with sensitized skin may opt for a cream. Regardless, the shaving medium should provide a lubricating cushion between the skin and the razor while providing a clean, close shave. It should lift and soften the beard but must continue to provide protection to the skin tissues.

3. **Post-Shave**
   The final step is the Post-Shave. Gone are the days when a man splashed alcohol on his face to remove the oily shave cream, close the pores, kill the bacteria and subtly perfume the skin. Fragrance, especially delivered via alcohol, is a leading cause of contact allergy in men and hyperpigmentation of the skin.
More appropriately, post-shave products should calm the skin, treat inflammation, control ingrown hairs, help eliminate congestion of pores and provide antioxidant and UV protection to the skin.

**The Grain**

Something else to consider when shaving is the direction the blade runs. Shaving the beard in the same direction as the hair shaft grows is often referred to as shaving with the grain. This is the desirable way to shave a beard in order to minimize irritation. Shaving against or across the grain will increase chances of irritation, redness, ingrown hairs and razor burn, which is why it is so important to pay attention to the direction of the beard growth.

If the beard is too long or the client has just shaved and you cannot determine the growth pattern, instruct the client to shave and wait approximately 1-3 days. He (or you, if performing a treatment) can then run a hand over the beard to determine the direction of the grain. Unfortunately, the direction of beard growth can be different all over the face and will most likely be completely different on the neck, making this a difficult task.

**Beneficial Ingredients**

When teaching male clients about shaving, tell them to look for products that reduce redness with ingredients such as caffeine, which is vaso-constricting. Products should also reduce irritation with botanical extracts that are rich in polyphenols such as Licorice, Allantoin, Aloe and Chamomile, which speed the recovery time. In addition, use balms that reinforce the barrier lipid layer with silicones and plant extracts (Wheat Germ, Yeast Extract, Shea Butter, etc.) to control and prevent sensitized skin, and use Salicylic Acid and Willow Bark Extract to prevent ingrown hairs. Finally, the ideal products will treat skin aging with antioxidants such as Vitamin C and Vitamin E to scavenge free radicals and anti-enzyme agents like Grape Seed Extract to inhibit the enzymes that break down collagen; the presence of peptides in products will stimulate new collagen.

**Healthy Beard, Healthy Skin**

There is no reason men should not have a great shave and healthy skin, and we can educate our male clients on how to best accomplish this. It can be a difficult task, as many men are typically ‘product-phobes,’ and many don’t like to take time, money or energy to invest the necessary work for shaving properly, something many must do every day. Teach your male clients the importance of going through each step of shaving, encourage them to invest in products that will facilitate the best possible shave while caring for the skin and always remind them to wear sunscreen after they shave.