

[The Great Shaving Disaster - And How To Avoid It](#)

Some men who have turned away from multi-blade razors and started using straight razors feel that maybe they have made a totally wrong choice - their face is now a disaster zone of chapped skin and tiny cuts! This article takes a look at what went wrong for them - and how to put it right.

I've lost count of the number of guys who, having decided for whatever reason to join the straight razor user fraternity, email me and say something along the lines of 'I tried my straight razor out today - did just as you said and my face is glowing with razor burn' or 'Hey I cut myself with the thing - and I was being really, really careful!'.

Nicking yourself with a straight razor isn't unusual, even for a seasoned user. After all, a straight razor has an extremely keen edge and the slightest slip can result in a nick. However, it's because the straight razor is so sharp that nicks - usually the tiniest and shallow of cuts - bleed so freely and stop so quickly - generally a splash of cold water is enough to seal them up.

The reason nicks occur is momentary loss of motor control in the hand holding the razor - and this tends to happen less and less with practice. At first you think of nothing but getting that blade across your face without disaster occurring. Pretty soon, though, you will find it begins to become easier as your brain picks up on a certain set of hand movements - the shaving set, let's say - and stamps them into the memory. It's a bit like learning to ride a bicycle or skateboard. At the start you fall off all the time, don't you? After a while you're managing OK, then later still you hardly think about how you do it - it's 'stamped in memory'.

On the other hand, that raw, stinging sensation commonly known as razor burn is caused by - if anything - simply too much attention to detail. Sound odd? Not really. You see, again, when new to straight razor usage, the tendency is to use short, choppy strokes of the razor down the face. Why? Well, these short strokes are easiest to control - the razor only moves an inch or two at most - but they do tend to be repeated in an attempt to get that really close shave. The result is excessive skin exfoliation by the razor's edge - in other words, razor burn.

Now, razor burn is unpleasant and it's one reason I advocate a change from multi-bladed razors to straight razors - a multi-blade may be easy to use but for each 'pass' you make you really make anything up to five 'passes' - depending on the number of blades in the cartridge. Result - razor burn if you're not very careful! When you gain experience in using your straight razor - and this doesn't take long, a week or two is usual, though you'll never stop learning - you can obtain a perfectly good shave using long, single 'passes' instead - typical of this is the stroke that starts below the sideburn and ends at the base of the neck. One pass!

As I said, this is easily achievable but it does take practice - again, it's motor control of the hand holding the blade. When mastered you should be able to achieve a smooth, consistent shave in all facial areas with a single 'pass' (or at most two) to each part. This is of course shaving 'with the grain' of the beard, following the direction of growth.

Many men do tend to also shave 'across the grain' and even 'against the grain'. This is a matter of personal choice but it should be remembered that, when straight razors were in common use, many makers advised only to shave 'with the grain' and that multiple passes equal - right, razor burn!

It was common at that time for men to shave twice daily, once in the morning and again around early evening - hence the phrase 'five o' clock shadow'. Sufficient time - usually about twelve hours - had passed for the stubble to 'shadow' the face and for further work to be needed. If this seems tedious, it certainly wouldn't have been to men of that era. Life was lived at a slower pace, people tended to rise earlier and take their time more. Men would have a leisurely shave with their straight razor - now too often replaced with the frantic sawing of the multi-blade before we dash out of the door!

So - do remember, all you potential converts out there, that using a straight razor takes practice. It takes skill to use it properly, in the manner it was intended to be used - to give a great, comfortable shave at leisurely pace; to introduce you calmly to the new day instead of grabbing you by the scruff of the neck and hurling you bodily into it. Practice may never make you perfect at straight razor usage but, with luck, it will become - as it has for many men - an oasis of calm in that desert commonly referred to as modern living.

So - take your time. Don't expect to be an instant expert. Strive for perfection - even though you may never attain it. And - most of all - learn to enjoy your shave, learn to enjoy having a bubble of time in which the only thing that matters is you, the steel, the shave and a smooth, smooth face. And that's what straight razor shaving is all about!

About the Author

For more information on straight razors, take a look at [The Invisible Edge](#) for information about Vintage models or visit [Dovo Razors UK](#) to see brand-new items.

