



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

An area of sun-damaged skin. Actinic keratosis can be a problem for people who spend a lot of time in the sun. It is the most common sun-related skin growth. It is considered a precancerous condition. The skin on exposed areas, such as the scalp, face, ears, lips, arms, and hands are most often affected.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sharply outlined, scaly, or crusted areas on exposed areas of skin.
- There may be single or multiple areas (patches).
- May be red, brown, or skin colored; flat or elevated.
- The patches are usually painless, but may sometimes itch.

CAUSES

- Prolonged exposure to the sun's radiation is the most common cause. It may develop years after the person's most intense sun exposure.
- Exposure to tanning devices, or rarely, to x-rays or certain industrial chemicals may be a cause.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Outdoor athletic activities and sports.
- Outdoor occupations, such as farming.
- Light (fair) complexion and blue, gray, or green eyes.
- Weak immune system due to illness or drugs.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Protect yourself against direct sun exposure. When outdoors, wear a hat and protective clothing. Use sun-screen lotions and creams with SPF ratings of 15 or more. Avoid sun between 10 AM and 4 PM if possible.
- Do skin self-exams on a regular basis (each month).

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

There are several types of effective treatment, and outcome is usually excellent. New outbreaks do sometimes occur following treatment.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Skin damage.
- Some risk of skin cancer if untreated. This is usually squamous cell carcinoma, which is curable when treated early.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider can diagnose the condition by an exam of the skin. Medical tests are usually not needed.
- Several treatment options are available. Your health care provider will discuss which one will work best for you, depending on the extent of the condition, your health, and your age.
- Cryosurgery (the most common treatment) is the application of liquid nitrogen to the skin.
- Curettage is the scraping away of the lesions with a sharp instrument.
- Excisional (cutting) surgery removes the lesions.
- Laser surgery may be used to destroy the cells.
- Dermabrasion is a treatment where the top layers of the skin are ground away.
- Photodynamic therapy. Medicine is applied to the affected skin, and then it is exposed to a special light.
- Chemical peels may be used for facial lesions.
- Get follow-up skin checkups every 6 months to ensure early detection and treatment of skin cancers.

MEDICATIONS

- Applications of 5-fluorouracil or masoprocol to the affected area may be used for a large affected area. These can cause irritation or an allergic reaction.
- Vitamin A and other drugs are being studied.

ACTIVITY

No limits. Reduce direct sun exposure.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You or a family member has signs of an actinic keratosis. Even though this causes no symptoms, it can be a risk for cancer.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page