

AD ALBANY[®] DERMATOLOGY

COSMETIC ESTHETIC MEDICAL SURGICAL

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ACTINIC KERATOSIS

Actinic keratosis (AKs) are rough, scaly patches or growths that form on skin that has been damaged by ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun or indoor tanning. AKs are thought to be precancerous, and can progress to become a squamous cell carcinoma. The prevalence of this condition increases with age. According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, actinic keratosis is the most common precancerous lesion, affecting more than 58 million Americans (<http://www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/Actinic-Keratosis>).

Signs and Symptoms:

- Most people with AKs will only notice changes to their skin. Symptoms include a rough-feeling patch on the skin that cannot be seen; a similar crusty patch or growth that feels painful when rubbed; and/or an itchy or burning area of skin.
- An AK can appear on the skin, remain for months, and then flake off and disappear from the skin's surface. While the skin may suddenly feel smooth, many AKs re-appear in a few days to a few weeks. Even if an AK does not re-appear, you need to be under a dermatologist's care.

Diagnosis:

- An AK is diagnosed following close examination of the skin. If a growth is found that is thick or looks like skin cancer during the examination, a skin biopsy will be performed as an in-office procedure.

Types of Treatment:

- The decision to treat is based on symptom relief or, most importantly, the prevention of malignancy. Treatment options include ablative (destructive) therapies such as cryosurgery, curettage with electrosurgery, and photodynamic therapy. For patients with multiple lesions, topical therapies can be used, including Fluorouracil, Imiquimod 5% cream and Diclofenac 3% gel. Some patients benefit from more than one type of treatment with improved outcome.

Treatment Outcome:

- Although most AKs remain benign, about 10-20% may advance to squamous cell carcinoma. About 40-60% of squamous cell carcinomas begin as untreated AKs and may advance to invade the surrounding tissues. About 2-10% of these squamous cell carcinomas spread to the internal organs and are life-threatening.
- Always return for follow-up skin examinations as recommended by your dermatologist. If skin cancer develops, the sooner it is detected and treated, the better the outcome.