

SEBORRHEIC KERATOSIS

Seborrheic keratosis is a common skin growth that is not contagious and always benign. These growths usually appear in middle-aged and older adults. Some people get just one but it is more common to have many.

Signs and Symptoms:

- Seborrheic keratosis start as small, slightly raised light brown spots, gradually thicken and become rough and warty, and may slowly darken and turn black. Color changes are no cause for concern. They range in size from a fraction of an inch to larger than a half-dollar.
- These growths can appear almost anywhere on the skin but not on the palms or soles. They are superficial and appear as if stuck on the skin.
- Seborrheic keratosis cause no pain although some may itch.

Diagnosis:

- Seborrheic keratosis can sometimes look like a skin cancer. A biopsy may be needed to confirm the diagnosis, involving shaving the growth off with a scalpel or scraping it off.
- Treatment is not necessary but removal is an option when the growth is difficult to distinguish from a skin cancer; gets large; is easily irritated when clothes or jewelry rub against it; and/or when unsightly to the patient.
- Do not try to remove a seborrheic keratosis yourself as there is a risk of infection.

Types of Treatment:

- Cryotherapy involves liquid nitrogen applied with a cotton swab or spray gun to freeze the growth. The seborrheic keratosis tends to fall off within days. A blister may form under the growth that will scab over and then fall off.
- Electrosurgery (electrocautery) involves numbing the growth with an anesthetic and using an electric current to cauterize (burn) it. A surgical instrument called a curette scrapes off the treated growth. There may be some bleeding but stitches are not required. Sometimes only electrosurgery or just curettage is needed.

Treatment Outcome:

- After removal of a seborrheic keratosis, the skin may be discolored. This usually fades with time but may be permanent. Most removed seborrheic keratoses do not return but new ones may occur elsewhere. In some instances, referral to a plastic surgeon may maximize the esthetic effect.