



SEBORRHEIC KERATOSIS

What is Seborrheic Keratosis?

A seborrheic keratosis, also known as “SK” or “seb ker,” is a benign (non-cancerous) growth of surface skin cells. SKs can look like warts, moles, or skin cancer and may be pigmented, so dermatologists often are consulted to determine the diagnosis and recommend a course of treatment.

Appearance of SK

- SKs range in color and may appear white, flesh-colored, yellow, pink, grey, beige, dark brown, or black. SKs may turn darker over time.
- SKs are usually round or oval. They can be flat or raised and may become thicker and scallier over time, and often appear as if they are “stuck-on” the skin.
- For many people, SKs begin to appear around age 30. Since the number of SKs tends to increase with age, people tend to take notice of them after age 40. Some people have only a few, while others develop dozens, or even hundreds.
- SKs can become inflamed, especially if they rub against clothing.

Location of SK

SKs often appear on the face (especially around the temples) or on the scalp, neck, shoulders, back, chest, or stomach, but can appear anywhere on the body, except the palms and soles.

Cause of SK and Prevention

- Surprisingly little is known about the cause of SKs. Aside from being related to increasing age, the condition seems to run in some families so it is widely thought that genetic factors may play a role. Family members tend to have similar age of onset and presentation of SKs.
- SKs are NOT contagious and do not appear to be caused by any virus.
- No methods for preventing SKs have been discovered.

Treatments

SKs are treated in a clinic or medical office, usually by a dermatologist. SKs do not go away on their own. These are the most common removal methods:

Cryosurgery

The doctor applies liquid nitrogen to freeze the SKs, which then will fall off within 1-3 weeks. Cryosurgery is often painful and causes inflammation that goes away in a few days. Sometimes, cryosurgery causes white spots, also known as hypopigmentation, which can be long-lasting or permanent. It may also cause reddish-brown discoloration known as hyperpigmentation that can last weeks to months.



Electrodesiccation

The doctor uses a needle-like device with an electric current that “burns” off the tissue. Local anesthesia may be used to manage pain. The wound generally heals within a week or so. Occasionally, temporary hyperpigmentation results.

Curettage

The doctor uses a metal hand tool with a small scoop at the tip, called a curette, to scrape off the SKs. Bleeding may occur but the wound heals within about a week and scarring is uncommon.

Shave Removal

The doctor uses a scalpel to remove the SK. Local anesthesia is used to manage pain. This method may be used when the doctor believes that a biopsy is needed to confirm the lesion is not cancerous or sometimes when the SKs are very thick, or irritated.



Treatment Cost

In most cases, there is no medical reason for removing SKs so health insurance does not cover the cost of treatment. Many people desire treatment to improve their cosmetic appearance. Dermatology practices will provide information about their fees for SK treatment to help patients with the decision to remove SKs or to leave them untreated.

For more information visit www.sebker.org