
SEBORRHEIC KERATOSES

They Are Not Age Spots, But They Come With Age

As we age, the skin becomes more susceptible to pigment spots and unwanted growths. Very common are the black or brown lesions that actually look as if they are stuck on the skin's surface. These benign, raised growths are called seborrheic keratoses. This scientific name presents a very accurate description. The term seborrhea relates to "greasy". The term keratosis means "thickening of the skin".

These lesions with a waxy texture attach to the outer layer of skin, appearing singly or in clusters. They tend to look like pieces of dirt or drops from a melted candle sitting on the skin and seem as if they can easily be picked off.

Also known as the barnacles of aging, most people will develop at least a few of these superficial growths, with occurrences increasing with age. However, seborrheic keratoses are not a health hazard.



The fictional witches of storybook fame were more likely to have a seborrheic keratosis on their nose than the wart they were given.

THINGS TO KNOW

- ◆ Most commonly found on the back, chest, face, neck and scalp. Less commonly found below the waist.
- ◆ Vary in color from light to dark brown to black. Color can change as they thicken.
- ◆ Not contagious and non-cancerous.
- ◆ May resemble a wart, with the surface being rough, filled with fissures and deep pits. Or they may be smooth with tiny bumps of a lighter or darker color.
- ◆ Appear to be pasted on because the edges are not attached to the skin.
- ◆ Tend to itch and this can increase with age. Scratching causes irritation.
- ◆ Can be very tiny or may be larger than a fifty cent piece.
- ◆ They are not moles, warts, melanoma or caused by exposure to the sun.

TREATMENT

Seborrheic keratoses are harmless, so it's best to leave them alone. However, they may be itchy, unsightly or in a spot that is constantly irritated by friction. In these cases, removal may be the best choice. There are 3 different methods used to remove a seborrheic keratosis.

- ◆ **Cryotherapy** - The growth is frozen with liquid nitrogen. This leads to a blister forming under the growth. The blister dries to a scab-like crust that falls off after several days.
- ◆ **Curettage** - A local anesthetic is applied and the growth is then scraped off. Bleeding is minimal and no stitches are necessary.
- ◆ **Electrosurgery** - A local anesthetic is applied and an electric current is used to burn the growth. Then it is scraped off the skin.

Since the growths are superficial, removal seldom causes a scar. However, it may leave a light or dark spot that fades over time.

(Sources: American Academy of Dermatology & American Osteopathic College of Dermatology)



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