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Common Skin Growths

As we grow older we often develop a number of different non-cancerous skin growths that include the following:

- Actinic Keratoses** Actinic keratoses (AKs) are rough spots that occur in sun-exposed areas, particularly on the face, balding scalp, tops of the ears and the backs of the hands and arms. An AK is a precancerous skin lesion caused by years of sun exposure that in time can turn into skin cancer. They should therefore be removed. They can be treated by various methods including freezing treatments with liquid nitrogen and by applying a medicated cream called 5-fluorouracil (Efudex or Carac).
- Angiomas** are benign small red spots we develop on our skin as we get older. They are more common on the trunk but can occur on other areas as well. They don't need to be treated, but if they get irritated by clothing, or bleed they can be removed with an electrical needle, lasers and intense pulsed light.
- Brown Flat "Sun-Spots"** are also known by the medical name "*lentigos or lentiginos*", are harmless, flat, brown discolorations of the skin that usually occur on the back of the hands, arms, neck and face of older adults. They are caused by years of sun exposure, are harmless and do not usually need to be treated. Liquid nitrogen therapy is the quickest way to get rid of age spots but can leave a permanent white spot. Age spots can also be treated with tretinoin (Retin-A) cream that is applied to the spots once a day for many months. This will sometimes cause lightening or disappearance of brown age spots. Age spots can also be treated with other retinoid creams, chemical peels, bleaching creams, lasers and intense pulsed light therapy.
- Dermatofibromas** are small firm benign bumps on the skin that most often occur on the arms and legs. They can be darker in color than the surrounding skin. No treatment is necessary and these spots can sometimes improve over the years. If they begin to grow more rapidly or become tender they should be biopsied. They often recur if cut out. It is better to shave the top off to make them flat, to lessen nicking them when shaving.
- Milia** are tiny pearly white to yellowish cysts that are commonly found on the face. No treatment is needed but they can be opened with a needle or scalpel blade and drained with pressure. There is no other effective treatment but topical tretinoin cream (Retin-A) can be tried to see if it prevents new milia from forming.
- Sebaceous Hyperplasia** This is the medical term for enlarged oil glands that frequently occur on the forehead, cheeks and nose. These small bumps are white, yellow, pink or orange in color. They often have a little indentation in the center. These are more common in patients with an oily complexion. They can be treated with topical medications, or destroyed with acid applications, electric needles, freezing or surgery.
- Raised "Age Spots"** also known by the medical name seborrheic keratoses (SKs), are very common growths that usually appear after the age of forty. SKs appear on both covered and uncovered parts of the body. The tendency to develop SKs is inherited. They are harmless and almost never become malignant. SKs begin as slightly raised, white, yellow, tan or brown spots. Gradually they thicken and take on a rough, wartlike surface. This is why some people call them "barnacles". They slowly darken and may turn dark brown. As one ages more of these spots develop. There is no medical need to treat SKs and some insurance companies will not cover the cost to have them treated unless they itch, hurt or are irritated. SKs can be frozen with liquid nitrogen, cut off, or burned off with an electric needle. The treated sites can sometimes leave permanent white spots but these usually look much better than the SK did.
- Skin Tags** are small growths of skin that some people develop on the face, neck, underarms, and the groin. They may be more numerous in diabetics and overweight people. The medical name is acrochordon. We don't know what causes them but we know that they are harmless and rarely become cancerous. You are likely to have inherited the tendency to develop skin tags from your mother or father. Skin tags do not need treatment. If skin tags become sore from rubbing on clothing or jewelry or if you find them unsightly, they can be removed by freezing or by cutting them off. Healing is usually complete in a week or two. New skin tags usually grow even if all existing ones are removed.

