
Understanding Seborrheic Keratosis

A seborrheic keratosis is a wart-like growth on the skin. These growths are not cancer. Most people get these growths when they are middle age or older.

How to say it

seh-bor-EE-ihk ker-ah-TOH-sis

What causes seborrheic keratoses?

Healthcare providers don't know what causes seborrheic keratoses. They may run in families. They become more common as people get older.

What are the symptoms of seborrheic keratoses?

Here is what seborrheic keratoses often look like:

- They tend to be a round or oval shape. They can be very small or about as big across as a quarter.
- They can appear singly or in clusters.
- They tend to be tan, brown, or black in color.
- The edges may be scalloped or uneven looking.
- They can have a waxy or scaly look.
- They can be a bit raised, looking like they're stuck on the skin.
- They may get red and irritated if scratched or rubbed by clothing

Seborrheic keratoses are not painful, but they may be itchy. They can become irritated if they are constantly rubbed by skin or clothing. Seborrheic keratoses most often appear on the face, arms, chest, back, or belly.

How are seborrheic keratoses treated?

Seborrheic keratoses don't need to be treated unless they bother you. You may want them removed because you don't like how they look. You may also want them removed because they get irritated and uncomfortable. Sometimes, seborrheic keratoses can look like more dangerous skin lesions. Your healthcare provider may remove them (biopsy) to tell the difference. A provider can remove them in an office visit. Ways that seborrheic keratoses can be removed include:

- Freezing them off with liquid nitrogen
- Cutting them off with a scalpel
- Using electric current to destroy the growth

What are possible complications of seborrheic keratoses?

Seborrheic keratoses are not cancer, but they can look like some types of skin cancer. So, it's a good idea to ask your healthcare provider to check any new skin growths. Ask your provider about any skin problem that concerns you.

When should I call my healthcare provider?

Call your healthcare provider right away if any of these occur:

- You develop a lot of seborrheic keratoses very quickly
- You have a sore that doesn't heal in a few weeks, or heals and then comes back
- You have a mole or skin growth that is changing in size, shape, or color
- You have a mole or skin growth that looks different on 1 side from the other
- You have a mole or skin growth that is not the same color throughout
- You have a mole or skin growth that bleeds