

ACTINIC KERATOSIS

YOU HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH ACTINIC KERATOSIS, ALSO KNOWN AS SOLAR KERATOSIS.

WHAT IS IT?

Actinic keratosis (AKs) are generally scaly or crusty growths (lesions) most often appearing on sun-exposed areas such as a bald scalp, face, ears, lips, backs of the hands and forearms, shoulders, or neck.

In the beginning, actinic keratosis are frequently so small that they are recognized by touch rather than sight. It feels as if you were running a finger over sandpaper. Early on, they may disappear only to reappear later. Most AKs become red, but some will be light or dark tan, pink, red, a combination of these, or the same color as your skin.

Occasionally they itch or produce a pricking or tender sensation. They can also become inflamed and surrounded by redness. In rare instances, actinic keratosis bleed.

HOW DID I GET IT?

If you have actinic keratosis, it indicates that you have sustained sun damage and could develop skin cancer.

PREVENTION

Studies have shown 500 milligrams of Nicotinamide (Vitamin B3) twice a day decreases the amount of AKs.

TREATMENT

Actinic keratosis are treated by destroying the lesion. Destruction is typically performed with liquid nitrogen or electrocautery. The lesions then crust and fall off.

An alternative method is a field treatment. These field treatments treat the entire area and therefore pick up and treat sub-clinical lesions. Field treatments include

- prescription medication to rub on the entire area
- chemical peels which peel off the top part of your skin
- photodynamic therapy (PDT) with blue or red light

Most of these treatments are performed in the fall or winter because they make you sensitive to the sun.



AFTERCARE

If you have been treated with liquid nitrogen, please care for the area by:

1. Wash the areas daily
2. Apply Vaseline Ointment. We discourage the use of antibiotic ointment because up to 10% of people have an allergy to a common antibiotic ointment ingredient. Studies have shown Vaseline works just as well as antibiotic ointments to prevent infection
3. Do not allow the areas to become dry and crusty because Actinic keratosis heals better when kept clean and moist.

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FIELD TREATMENTS:

- PDT and Blue/red light – see PDT and Blue/red light handout
- Chemical peel - see Chemical Peel handout
- Topical Prescription medications

FOR ALL TOPICAL MEDICATIONS:

Before you apply this medication to the skin, clean the affected area and dry well. Wait 10 minutes, then apply a small amount of medication to the affected skin, using just enough to cover the area with a thin film. Wash your hands immediately after applying this medication, even if you have used gloves.

- The treated area may become unsightly during treatment and in some cases for several weeks after treatment. Do not cover the area with tight dressings or plastic bandages.
- Avoid applying this medication in or around the eyes or eyelids. Also, do not apply this medication inside the nose or mouth. If you do get the medication in these areas, rinse with plenty of water.
- Use this medication exactly as prescribed. Do not stop using this medication without consulting your doctor. Do not increase your dose or use it more often than directed. Your condition will not clear faster, but side effects will be increased.
- If your condition worsens or does not improve, call Valley Skin Institute at (559) 472-SKIN

EFUDEX (5- FLUOROURACIL)

- DOSE: apply to the affected area twice daily Monday through Friday for two weeks. If your skin is very sensitive, you may need to decrease this to ONCE daily.
- IF THE AREAS BECOME VERY INFLAMED AND OPEN, STOP THE MEDICATION.

ALDARA (IMIQUIMOD)

This medication comes in small packets. If you are covering a larger area (such as the face), you may need to use the entire packet. Otherwise, poke a small hole in the packet and use enough to cover the area then close the packet up to use the following day.

- DOSE: apply to the affected area twice daily Monday through Friday for two weeks. If your skin is very sensitive, you may need to decrease this to ONCE daily.
- IF THE AREAS BECOME VERY INFLAMED AND OPEN, STOP THE MEDICATION.

PICATO

This medication must be refrigerated. Apply a small amount to the area every night for three nights if applying to the face. For the body apply every night for two nights.