

What are seborrhoeic keratoses?

Seborrhoeic keratoses (seb K), also known as seborrhoeic warts and basal cell papillomas, are benign (harmless) growths caused by a build-up of skin cells. **They cannot turn into skin cancer.**

Seb K are **extremely common**; almost everyone older than 50 has at least one, some people have many more. Seb K are uncommon under the age of 20 years.

What do seborrhoeic keratoses look and feel like?

- **Often multiple** but can be solitary. May be grouped in certain areas such as under the breasts and in the groin
- Vary in size from a few mm to several cm
- Often brown/black, but can be skin-coloured or pink
- Raised, **often with a crusty/warty surface, but can be smooth or waxy** to the touch
- Can feel itchy and may be easily traumatised e.g. by catching on clothing or jewellery and bits can drop off or they may bleed. Any inflammation (redness) should settle within a few weeks

What causes seborrhoeic keratoses?

The cause is **not known**. Seb K are nothing to do with sebaceous (oil) glands or viral warts. They are **not infectious** (i.e. cannot be passed from one person to another). In people with a large number of seb K there be a hereditary component (i.e. another family member may also have many seb K). Skin friction may be the reason they appear in body folds.

Things you can do to help yourself

- Diet and other lifestyle changes will not make a difference. Applying a regular emollient (moisturiser) may help, particularly if a seborrhoeic keratosis is itchy
- **Learn what skin cancer looks like** - for more information please refer to bottom right of the www.pcds.org.uk homepage, click on **Patient Section Including How to Check Your Moles**, then on the next page click **Self-examination of moles**

Make an appointment at your GP surgery

Most seb K do **NOT** need treatment. Even if they grow, they cannot turn into skin cancer. The only reasons for contacting your GP surgery are:

- If one or more of the seb K catch and bleed on a persistent basis, in which case treatment may be offered
- **If you develop a skin lesion that looks different to the others i.e. an ‘ugly duckling’**

Treatment for seborrhoeic keratoses

- Most seb K do **NOT** need treatment
- Those that catch and bleed repeatedly may be treated by freezing with liquid nitrogen (cryotherapy), or scraping off (curettage) using local anaesthetic
- Even with treatment, seb K can grow back
- Seb K cannot be treated on the NHS for cosmetic reasons

Can seborrhoeic keratoses be cured?

- Seb K usually persist, and you may develop more – you cannot prevent new ones from growing

Helping with other skin conditions

If you, a family member, or friend have an undiagnosed skin condition; or you want to learn more about how to treat skin conditions, please visit www.pcds.org.uk – if you click the purple tile near the top of the homepage that reads **Take a Tour** you can learn how best to use this website.