Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

About Seborrheic Keratosis (SK)

This information explains what seborrheic keratosis (SK) is. It also explains how it's diagnosed.

What is seborrheic keratosis?

Seborrheic keratosis (SEB-uh-REE-ik KEHR-uh-TOH-sis) is a benign skin growth. Benign means it is not cancer. You may have 1 or many of these growths.

SK can be light tan, brown, or black in color. It is a small, flat, rough patch on your skin. If the patch is irritated, it can become painful, with redness or bleeding.

It's often easy to see where your normal skin ends and where SK starts.

SK is most common on these parts of the body:

- Chest
- Abdomen (belly)
- Back
- Face

How is seborrheic keratosis diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will use a handheld tool called a dermatoscope to look at your SK. This tool works like a flashlight with a strong magnifying glass attached. Your healthcare provider will look through it to see areas of your skin up close.

Depending on how big the growth is, your healthcare provider may do a biopsy.

They may remove the whole growth or part of it. They'll send it to a lab to examine under a microscope.

SK is not skin cancer. If you notice a new or changing growth on your skin, ask your healthcare provider to look at it.

Does seborrheic keratosis need treatment?

You do not need treatment for SK. You may choose to have treatment for cosmetic reasons. To learn more, talk with your healthcare provider.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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