



Actinic Keratosis

Your doctor has informed you that you have one or more actinic keratoses. These are wholly benign changes in the cells found in the outermost layer of your skin. Nevertheless, actinic keratoses can be considered a very early-stage, precancerous condition that can develop into a form of skin cancer known as squamous cell carcinoma.

Actinic keratoses develop in sun-damaged skin. They generally occur in the elderly, appearing on the face, ears, backs of the hands, or chest, or on the scalps of people with thinning hair. However, they can also develop on any other areas of the body that have been exposed to sunlight. It is the total amount of sunlight a person has been exposed to during their lifetime that causes these lesions. Light-skinned people run a greater risk of developing actinic keratoses than dark-skinned people.

Signs of disease

More often than not, actinic keratoses appear as one or more rough and scaly spots on the skin that are usually reddish or red-brown in colour. In some cases, these spots can be felt more than seen, and some may itch.

Treatment

Actinic keratoses should usually be treated. There are several types of treatment. Any thick scaling may need to be scraped off before treatment. One way to remove the actinic keratosis is via freezing using liquid nitrogen (cryosurgery). Another treatment is to use a special cream that destroys the damaged cells. A third option is a special kind of light therapy called photodynamic therapy. All treatments cause minor damage to the skin, causing the body to replace the damaged area with healthy skin after a few weeks. Any thick scaling may need to be scraped off before freezing. Widespread actinic keratoses can be treated using a special kind of light therapy called photodynamic therapy, or using special creams that destroy the damaged cells.

Check-ups

Most patients won't need to schedule regular check-ups with a dermatologist. However, there is a risk that your lesion might reoccur, or that new actinic keratoses may appear on other parts of your body. If you notice anything suspicious, please contact your doctor at your local healthcare centre (vårdcentral).

Sun protection

Using sunscreen regularly protects you from developing actinic keratosis in the skin. To reduce your risk and slow the rate of new, similar skin lesions occurring, you should protect yourself from the sun. The sun's UV radiation is strongest in the middle of the day, between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Stay in the shade when possible. You will get the best protection by covering up with clothing and a hat. Clothing made from tightly woven fabric offers very effective protection. You should apply sunscreen to any body parts that you cannot cover with clothing. Your sunscreen should have a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30, be marked with the UVA symbol and be pleasant to use. Apply a generous amount and repeat the application during the day and after bathing. Avoid tanning in solariums.