

# ACTINIC KERATOSIS



## THE TREATMENT OPTIONS

**ACTINIC KERATOSIS (AK)**, also known as solar keratosis, is a precancerous lesion of the epidermis (outer layer of skin) that is caused by long-term exposure to sunlight. Chronic sunlight exposure alters the keratinocytes (cells that make up the majority of the epidermis) and causes areas of your skin to become scaly, rough, discolored and sometimes tender to the touch. AKs are most commonly found on sun-exposed areas such as the face, lips, ears, neck, scalp, forearms and backs of hands. People who have fair skin and light-colored hair and eyes are at the greatest risk of developing AKs. Individuals who are immunosuppressed, either by cancer chemotherapy treatments or organ transplants, and who have an immunodeficiency disorder, are also considered high risk for developing AKs.

AKs are not life threatening as long as they are diagnosed and treated in the early stages. If left untreated, aggressive AKs have the potential to progress into squamous cell carcinoma, a serious type of skin cancer. Therefore, it is important to report any suspicious skin lesions to your physician.

Because chronic overexposure to sunlight is the leading cause of actinic keratosis, sun avoidance, especially during peak sunlight hours of 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., is an important preventive measure to help reduce the risk of developing this precancerous lesion.

Limit skin exposure to the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays by wearing broad-brimmed hats and protective, tightly woven clothing. Furthermore, use a broad-spectrum sunscreen, rated SPF-15 or higher, on all exposed skin, including the lips, even on cloudy days. Reapply sunscreen frequently. Additionally, avoid tanning salons and artificial tanning devices.

Inspect your entire body regularly for any skin changes, especially those already mentioned, and **routinely visit your physician for a skin examination.**



Physicians often diagnose and treat AKs based on clinical appearance alone, but sometimes a skin biopsy is needed. After a dermatopathologist assesses your skin tissue under a microscope and determines the lesion is an AK, your physician will discuss several treatment options with you. Your treatment may vary based on the location, size of the lesion and the amount of AKs you have developed. Your age and general health will also be taken into consideration. Common treatment options are cryosurgery (freezing lesion with liquid nitrogen), topical chemotherapy creams, photodynamic therapy, chemical peels and laser resurfacing therapy. Your physician will help you decide which option is best for you.

## DON'T BECOME A STATISTIC

*One in six people will develop an AK in their lifetime. Since cumulative sun exposure increases with age, older people are more likely to develop AKs. Patients with multiple AKs have a lifetime risk of progression to squamous cell carcinoma of up to 10%.*

*Source: 2009 American Cancer Society*