



Treating Common Skin Growths

Introduction

Welcome to my presentation on Benign Skin Lesions. Many people have concerns about skin growths or lesions. The good news is, most skin lesions are not harmful – the medical term we use to describe these is “benign.” These include colored skin spots, bumps, growths, and moles. All these growths are genetically programmed to appear at a certain age. How many of these appear at a certain site is also determined genetically. These growths can be a source of worry if they are mistaken for skin cancer. This presentation will help you recognize skin growths that are not cancerous, provide guidance on when to contact your doctor, and help you make informed choices about treatment options. Keep in mind that coverage of the services, for the conditions we see in this presentation, is subject to all the terms and conditions of your health plan coverage.

Before we begin, I would like to introduce myself. I am Dr. Sandhya Yadav, Chief of Dermatology at the Santa Clara Medical Center. I have practiced Dermatology in the San Francisco Bay Area for twelve years, and have special training in the field of melanoma. Here at Santa Clara, innovation in medical care is encouraged and I was given the support necessary to make this presentation a reality.

Cherry Hemangioma

The last non-cancerous growth we will see in this presentation is the Cherry Hemangioma. These are harmless clusters of dilated blood vessels, which appear as red spots. They increase in size and number over the years. Their cause is unknown, and they rarely bleed or cause pain. Like all the benign growths we have seen, today they cannot lead to cancer.

This person has many Cherry Hemangiomas on the chest. If a Cherry Hemangioma bleeds, you should see your Dermatologist to have it removed. If you think you have a Cherry Hemangioma, or if you have been diagnosed with Cherry Hemangiomas and want them removed for cosmetic reasons, please contact your Kaiser Permanente Dermatology Cosmetic Clinic, where you can obtain treatment on a fee-for-service basis.

Dermatofibroma

Another harmless growth is the Dermatofibroma. A Dermatofibroma is a nodule that is usually very firm to the touch. It remains the same size or can gradually enlarge over the years. It can be tender to the touch, but never drains fluid. Often Dermatofibromas are brown in color.

This Dermatofibroma is on the leg and has been present for years.

Because Dermatofibromas do not lead to cancer, they are best left alone. If you think you have a Dermatofibroma, or if you have been diagnosed with one, it can be surgically removed, but often the resulting scar is larger and more unsightly than the original Dermatofibroma.

Epidermal Cysts

Let us begin with the epidermal cyst. It starts as a small lump underneath the skin, which can enlarge slowly over the years.

On close inspection you can see a central pore. When squeezed, foul smelling white or oily material is drained. Squeezing these cysts is not recommended since this will increase the chance of infection. Epidermal cysts that are infected are very painful. Infected cysts need to be drained by a doctor and an oral antibiotic prescribed. Once a cyst has become infected, application of warm compresses at home also helps with healing.

This is an infected cyst draining some pus. If you think you have an infected cyst, then you should go to your nearest Urgent Care / Minor Injury Clinic for treatment. You may also contact a Telephone Advice Nurse and request a same day appointment.

A few people carry the gene that makes their bodies form multiple cysts. If a cyst reaches a size that causes discomfort, usually the size of a golf ball, you should discuss its removal with your physician. When appropriate your doctor can arrange a referral to the Medical Dermatology Clinic for its removal.

On the other hand, if the cysts are small, they are best left alone. If a small cyst is located in a visible area, though not causing problems, then the Dermatology Cosmetic Clinic is the appropriate place to make an appointment to have it removed. Removing cyst for cosmetic reasons, will be done on a fee-for-service basis.

Remember, do not squeeze cysts as this can lead to pain and infection. If you suspect a cyst is infected, go to the Urgent Care / Minor Injury Clinic for surgical drainage and antibiotics or call the Telephone Advice Nurse for a same day appointment.

Moles

Moles are collection of darkened, or pigmented cells in the skin. They are a normal part of the skin and the majority of these growths remain non-cancerous. An important way to prevent moles from turning into skin cancer is to avoid sunburns and tanning. You can protect yourself by applying sunscreen and wearing sun-protective clothing.

We acquire new moles throughout our lives, most noticeable during the teens and twenties. As we age, we gradually lose our moles. An important point to remember is that if moles are rubbed or scratched, this does not increase the likelihood of them turning into cancer.

Here are two benign moles on the chin. On the face they often have hairs growing within them. It is not dangerous to remove these hairs by cutting, plucking or laser hair removal.

As moles age, they can resemble gumdrops on the skin.

Flat moles can be dark brown or black. Benign, flat moles have an oval or round shape. They have an even color tone or appearance.

If you think you have benign moles, or have been diagnosed with these moles, removal is considered optional. If you would like these removed for cosmetic reasons, please contact your

nearest Kaiser Permanente Dermatology Cosmetic Clinic, where you can obtain treatment on a fee-for-service basis.

Seborrheic Keratoses

Let us begin with the most common benign skin growth we see, the Seborrheic Keratoses, abbreviated “S.K.” Often people become alarmed because these lesions can gradually enlarge, or increase in number over the years. Here are some tips on how to recognize SK’s.

Typically they feel soft and velvety although they can be quite scaly or crusty. They can range from large, flat, soft velvety thickenings of the skin to small dark bumps.

SK lesions can appear anywhere on the body, from the face to the feet. On the ankles, they are often whitish bumps called Stucco Keratoses. If you take sections of these growths and look at them under a microscope, you would see thickening of the outer layers of the skin. Because these lesions are on the surface of the skin, they can be scratched off easily.

Once again, despite their sometimes scary appearance, SK lesions are always benign, and cannot lead to skin cancer. They do increase in size and number with age. I affectionately call them wisdom spots. They do not extend below the skin or cause any harm. Generally they do not bleed unless accidentally scratched. Since they are not warts, they are not contagious and cannot to spread to others.

On rare occasions, SK’s can become very itchy. Applying an over-the-counter Hydrocortisone cream for a few days may help. If the SK becomes sore, the surrounding skin becomes red, and the surface develops a black scab or crust, it may be a sign of an infection. This is called an inflamed SK. If you think you have an inflamed SK, or if you have been diagnosed with an inflamed SK, there are two possibilities for treatment.

SK’s that are inflamed at the time of an office visit can be removed either with freezing or with a scalpel under local anesthesia. If you have an infection, an antibiotic will also be prescribed. The removal and treatment of inflamed SK’s is considered a benefit that is covered Kaiser Permanente Health Plan.

SK’s that are not inflamed, are not bleeding, or do not have pieces of dead tissue present at the time of an office visit are considered a normal part of aging. Their removal would not be covered as a Kaiser Permanente Health Plan benefit. If you have a SK that is not inflamed, but would like to have it removed for cosmetic reasons, please contact your nearest Kaiser Permanente Dermatology Cosmetic Clinic.

For more information, please visit the website, www.kpcosmeticservices.com. Treatment for non-covered conditions like this, is provide by the Dermatology Cosmetic Clinic, on a fee-for-service basis, which means you are responsible for all cost of treatment and care.

Skin Tags

Let’s look at another common growth called the “skin tag.” Like SK’s, skin tags increase in number with age. They are not cancerous and cannot be spread to others.

Removal of skin tags is considered cosmetic unless they are infected or bleeding. Fortunately, skin tags rarely bleed or become infected. This is an example of a skin tag has dead tissue at its

tip, has recently bled and would be removed in the Medical Dermatology Clinic. Removal of infected skin tags is a covered benefit under your Health Plan.

Here in the skin folds, there are many tags. They are flesh colored and if you pull on one, you will see that it is connected to the skin by a thin stalk.

If you think you have skin tags, or have been diagnosed with skin tags that are not infected, their removal would not be covered as a Health Plan benefit. If you would like these removed, please contact your nearest Kaiser Permanente Dermatology Cosmetic Clinic, where you can be treated on a fee-for-service basis.

Summary

All of the growths we have seen in this presentation are normal skin changes that occur with aging. Unless they are bleeding or become infected, they should be left alone.

In closing, I encourage you to show any skin growth that gives you concern to your primary care provider. Your provider will refer you to a Dermatologist if it is medically appropriate. I hope you have found this presentation helpful in identifying common benign skin growths and in understanding the treatment options for each. For more information, or if you have any questions or concerns, please consult with your doctor. Thank you for your interest in your skin health.