

Department of plastic surgery

# Actinic keratosis

## What is Actinic keratosis?

Actinic keratosis is also called Solar keratosis because it is caused by long-term exposure of skin to ultraviolet rays contained in the sunlight. It is a very common condition in white-skinned people particularly over the age of 50.

It appears as single or multiple skin patches which are reddish, rough and scaly. It is common to have this on the areas of the skin which are usually exposed to the sun such as face, ears, scalp, back of hands and lower leg but it can occur on any part of the body.

Actinic keratosis is not a skin cancer but in a small number of cases it can develop into one, so it is advisable to seek medical advice.

Various treatment options are available, such as creams (topical chemotherapy), freezing (cryotherapy), surgery or exposure to special light (photodynamic therapy). Your doctor will advise which of these is suitable for you. Once the lesion is adequately treated it rarely comes back. However, there is an increased chance of developing new lesions and for that reason you must take the following steps:

- Examine your skin regularly and seek medical advice for any lesion that does not heal in six weeks.
- Protect your skin from ultraviolet radiation in strong sunlight:
  - Avoid exposure to the sun.
  - Cover up with loose fitting but closely woven clothes.
  - Wear a wide-brimmed hat and protective sunglasses.
  - Use a high SPF sunscreen (15 or more). When choosing a sunscreen look for one which protects against UVB, has the UVA circle logo and/or 4 or 5 UVA stars to protect against UVA. Apply plenty of sunscreen 15 to 30 minutes before going out in the sun, and reapply every two hours and straight after swimming and towel-drying.
  - Avoid tanning under sunlamps.

## Further information

- Your GP.
- Clinical nurses specialist at The Christie **0161 918 7587**.
- Macmillan Cancer Support has information on all aspects of cancer. Lines answered by specialist nurses. Freephone **0808 808 0000** open Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)
- British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons [www.bapras.org.uk](http://www.bapras.org.uk)



If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact [patient.information@christie.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@christie.nhs.uk)

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for  
urgent support and specialist advice  
**The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658**  
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

