

Department of plastic surgery

Actinic keratosis

What is actinic keratosis?

Actinic keratosis (also called solar keratosis) is caused by long-term exposure of skin to ultraviolet rays in sunlight. It is a very common in light-skinned people particularly over the age of 50.

It appears as single or multiple skin patches which are red in colour, rough and scaly. It is common on the areas of the skin which are usually exposed to the sun such as face, ears, scalp, back of hands and lower leg. However, 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 if left untreated.

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 properly treated it rarely comes back. However, there is an increased chance of developing new lesions and for that reason you must:

- examine your skin regularly and seek medical advice for any lesion that does not heal in 6 weeks
- protect your skin from ultraviolet radiation in strong sunlight:
 - avoid excessive 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 (50 or more) and choose one that protects against UVB, has the UVA circle logo, and/or is 4 or 5 stars. Apply plenty of sunscreen 15 to 30 minutes before going out in the sun, and reapply every 2 hours and straight after swimming and towel-drying
 - avoid sunbeds



Contacts

If you have any concerns or questions, call:
Clinical nurse specialists **0161 918 7587**

Further information

Macmillan Cancer Support has information on all aspects of cancer. Lines answered by specialist nurses.
Freephone **0808 808 0000** open 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week www.macmillan.org.uk

British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons 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.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham, Salford or Macclesfield. 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