Solar keratoses
Information for patients
Introduction

You have been given a diagnosis of solar keratoses. This leaflet is designed to provide further information about your diagnosis and treatment options.

What are solar keratoses?

Solar keratoses, otherwise known as actinic keratoses, are a common feature of sun-damaged skin and arise in exposed areas such as the face, backs of hands and arms, and in women on the lower legs.

They occur most commonly in fair-skinned people (blue eyes, red hair, freckles and a tendency to burn in the sun). People who have lived or worked abroad in a sunny place or who have worked outdoors or enjoy outdoor hobbies are most at risk. It may take many years before they start, not usually appearing before the age of 40.

They appear as small red patches ranging from ½ cm to 3 cm wide with a rough surface. Sometimes the skin can become very thick over them and occasionally they can have the appearance of horns or spikes. Very rarely they can develop into a skin cancer that will require removal under local anaesthetic. You or your doctor would recognise this because the patch would begin to grow quickly, would bleed and/or form an ulcer.

How are they diagnosed?

Solar keratoses may be diagnosed by their appearance to the naked eye. The diagnosis may be confirmed by taking a sample and examining it under the microscope.
Treatment options

Solar keratoses can be cured with a variety of treatments including freezing, scraping, surgical removal or with a special cream. If the patch is not troublesome, however, your doctor may simply recommend that it is kept under observation.

Self-help

It is important to protect the skin from the sun once you have solar keratoses and you should wear a sunscreen or a hat daily during the summer months (even on dull days as the sun’s rays still get through the clouds). Your doctor or nurse can advise you further about sun safety.

Further information

British Association of Dermatologists
Willan House
4 Fitzroy Square
London W1T 5HQ
Tel: 0207-383-0266
www.bad.org.uk

Cancer Research UK
Tel: 0808 800 4040
www.cancerresearchuk.org

Who to contact

If you have any questions about your diagnosis or management your GP will be able to advise you.
If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221473 or email PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk