



Searles Wellness

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Actinic Keratoses

What causes actinic (solar) keratoses?

Repeated, prolonged sun exposure causes damage, especially in fair-skinned persons. Sun-damaged skin becomes dry and wrinkled and may form rough, scaly spots called actinic keratoses. These rough spots remain on the skin even though the crust is picked off.

Why treat actinic keratoses?

Actinic keratoses are not skin cancers. Because they sometimes turn cancerous, however, actinic keratoses should be considered for removal.

When there are many keratoses, a useful, but aggressive and very irritating treatment is the application of 5-fluorouracil (5-FU). The medication is rubbed onto the sun-damaged skin for, usually, two or three weeks. After 3 to 7 days the treated area begins to get red and tender.

The applications are continued until your physician determines that you have the needed results. Healing starts when the 5-FU is stopped. 5-FU is effective in removing actinic keratoses from the face, but is often less effective when used on the hands, forearms, or back.

Prevention

Sun damage is permanent. Once sun damage has progressed to the point where actinic keratoses develop, new keratoses may appear as one grows older even without further sun exposure. You should avoid excessive sun exposure. We recommend hats with a wide brim all the way around and an SPF 15 or greater sunscreen with any sun exposure. Minimize sun exposure between 10 am and 2 pm when the sunlight is most damaging.