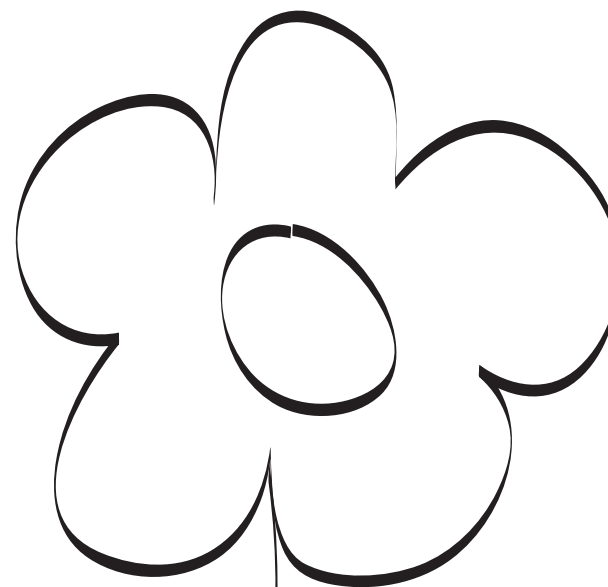


Useful Contacts

Dermatology Appointments	0207 830 2824
Radiotherapy Information Service	0207 472 6739
Royal Free Website	www.royalfree.nhs.uk
Macmillan Cancerline	0808 808 2020 www.macmillan.org.uk
Cancerbacup	0808 800 1234 www.cancerbacup.org.uk



Patient Information Leaflet

Solar Keratosis (actinic keratosis)

What is a solar keratosis?

Solar keratoses are common and are caused by over-exposure of the skin to sunlight over many years. These lesions are also known as actinic keratoses. They most frequently occur on sun-exposed skin such as the scalp, face, forehead, backs of the hands and forearms.

Sunlight contains ultra-violet light, which is responsible for both the normal aging of the skin and is the main cause of skin cancer. Solar keratoses are a form of pre-cancer and in some cases skin cancers can develop within them.

Who is most at risk of developing solar keratoses?

Solar keratoses can occur in anybody if they have been exposed to a lot of sun for a long time. They are seen most frequently in middle aged to elderly adults with white skin. Those most at risk include outdoor workers, sailors and the very fair skinned (who burn

easily in the sun). People who take drugs to suppress the immune system (eg: following an organ transplant) are also at increased risk of developing solar keratoses.

What do solar keratoses look like?

They are usually patches of dry, scaly skin that can vary in colour from pink to red to brown. The lesions may be flat but can also be raised (bumps), especially when they are on the arms and hands. They can sometimes be confused with other types of skin lesion and can look identical to an early squamous cell carcinoma (a form of skin cancer).

How are solar keratoses treated?

There are several methods of treating solar keratoses. These include cryotherapy (freezing) and curettage (scraping the lesion off the skin, performed under local anaesthetic). If there are multiple lesions in

the same area of skin (eg:the scalp), a topical cream applied daily (usually for a period of at least 4 weeks) may be prescribed. This is a form of topical chemotherapy which causes the abnormal skin cells to die (but not the normal healthy cells). It can sometimes make the skin quite sore during treatment.

In cases where the Doctor cannot exclude a skin cancer the lesion may be cut out and the wound stitched. The piece of skin is then looked at under the microscope to confirm the diagnosis.

Does treatment result in a cure?

Although the solar keratoses that have been treated will usually resolve, it is very likely that more lesions will develop, requiring further treatment. The development of solar keratoses is a sign that the underlying skin is damaged from many years of sun exposure and this cannot be reversed.

How can they be prevented?

Reducing exposure of the skin to the sun is most important. Wearing protective clothing and wide-brimmed hats when outdoors will protect the skin areas most at risk. Application of Sun Block (Sun Protection Factor (SPF) 25 or above) to exposed areas of skin before going out in the sun and re-application every 2-3 hours (more frequently if swimming or perspiring) is also very important. It is also advisable to avoid the sunshine during the mid-day hours. Sun beds should be avoided.