

SKIN SENSE

Facts From The Experts

Look For Early Warning Signs Of Cancer

(NAPSA)—If you and your family have been in the sun recently, now is a smart time to check everyone's skin for changes or abnormalities that may have been caused by sun damage. One of the most common but frequently overlooked skin conditions is called Actinic Keratosis (AK). AK is a common precancerous skin condition that appears as dry, scaly or rough patches on the skin. More than 10 million people in the United States have AK, but only about 2 to 3 million are currently being treated. AK is actually the second most common reason for patient visits to the dermatologist. AK results from chronic, cumulative sun exposure and may lead to squamous cell carcinoma, a potentially serious skin cancer.

Not all AKs turn into squamous cell carcinoma, but it is impossible to predict which ones will. AK lesions are most often found on the head, scalp, face, neck, shoulders, forearms, hands and legs—the parts of the body frequently exposed to the sun. Not all AK lesions are visible, and the treatment of visible lesions does not always prevent further AK lesions from developing. People with fair skin, light eyes and hair, a history of cumulative sun exposure or a weakened immune system are at greatest risk for developing AK. It can take years for AK to develop, typically appearing after age 40. However, even people in their 20s can develop AK.

“Extended time in the sun puts just about everyone at risk for AK,” said James M. Spencer, M.D., M.S., clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City. “Dry, scaly, rough patches could indicate a serious skin condition such as AK, so if you have any of these symptoms, it's important to visit your doctor to determine if treatment is needed.”

The newest treatment option for AK is Aldara™ (imiquimod) Cream, 5%, an immune response modifier (IRM) that treats AK lesions “from the inside out” by stimulating the skin's own immune system. Aldara Cream, a topical prescription medicine, is the only IRM approved to treat AK on the face and scalp of adults with normal immune systems. Aldara also reveals and treats AK lesions below the surface before they even appear on the skin. In research studies with Aldara Cream, patients had a follow-up visit 12 to 18 months after treatment. The majority of patients who cleared their AK lesions remained AK-free.

If you notice any changes to your skin, it's important to visit a health care professional early for diagnosis and treatment. For more information about how to treat AK, visit www.treatak.com, a Web site that provides the opportunity to learn what to look for on your skin through a self-exam.