

If Your Skin Could Talk, What Would It Say?

(NAPSA)—What is your skin telling you? Did you spend a lot of time in the sun last summer? What about the summer before that? Sun exposure on unprotected skin year after year may leave you with more than a few freckles.

Sunburns and moles aren't the only indication that skin has been damaged. After years of exposure to the sun, you may discover red spots that feel rough, dry or scaly and don't go away, even after using moisturizer. Sometimes called "sun spots" or mistaken for age spots, these patches could be actinic keratosis (AK), a skin condition that can lead to squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), a non-melanoma form of skin cancer.

It is estimated that AK affects up to 58 million Americansⁱ, yet most people are unaware of its symptoms and association with sun damage. Because AK is a result of cumulative sun exposure, it can take years to develop. A job that requires a substantial amount of time outside or everyday activities such as gardening, exercise or attending outdoor



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sporting events can lead to sun damage if your skin isn't adequately protected. People at high risk are often fair-skinned men and women over the age of 40 who may have accumulated a significant amount of sun exposure over the course of many years.

One in five Americans will

develop skin cancer in the course of their lifetimeⁱⁱ, and AKs have the potential to progress to squamous cell carcinoma, the second most common type of skin cancer. It's important to check your skin year-round and note any changes in texture and color—these changes may be age spots, irritation or dry skin, but they may also require more attention.

According to the National Institutes of Health, specific characteristics of AK includeⁱⁱⁱ:

- A skin patch or growth, often limited to one area, that begins as flat and scaly;
- Presence on the face, scalp, back of the hands, chest or other sun-exposed areas;
- A color that can be gray, pink, red or the same color as the skin;
- Later development into a hard and wart-like or gritty, rough and "sandpapery" surface;
- In some cases, the lesions may be easier to feel than to see.

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ⁱ Lewin Group. *Burden of Skin Diseases*. 2005. Prepared for The Society for Investigative Dermatology and the American Academy of Dermatology Association. Available at: http://www.lewin.com/~-/media/lewin/site_sections/publications/april2005skindisease.pdf. Accessed November 1, 2011.

ⁱⁱ Robinson JK. *Sun Exposure, Sun Protection, and Vitamin D*. *JAMA* 2005; 294: 1541-43.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Actinic Keratosis." *Medline Plus*. National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health, updated October 8, 2010. Accessed November 21, 2011. <<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000827.htm>>.