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July 7, 2004

SKIN "BARNACLES" - OR FUNNY SKIN GROWTHS YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED

Skin "barnacles?" Charming picture, eh? I can't take credit for this fanciful term. I actually got this from a piece written by board-certified dermatologist, Dr. Robert P. Friedman of Arizona. Dr. Friedman likens aging skin to the hull of a ship, which accumulates barnacles on its journeys through the sea.

It makes sense -- as you sail through life, you've probably accumulated a variety of funny growths on your skin. If not, count yourself among the fortunate. If so, you've probably wondered about your various "barnacles." So, here's the scoop according to Dr. Friedman, who works with many seniors.

SEBORRHEIC KERATOSIS: WART-LIKE GROWTHS

Seborrheic keratosis growths are commonly confused with moles and sometimes even certain skin cancers. However, they are benign, flesh-colored or brown, and have a "stuck-on" appearance, which emerge in your thirties. Humans can have hundreds of these growths, which appear anywhere on the skin, except the palms and soles!

Medical treatment or removal is not necessary for keratosis growths unless they are irritated or cosmetically displeasing and you are vain.

CHERRY ANGIOMAS: CHERRY RED LESIONS

Check your trunk - cherry angiomas are found primarily there! If you are 20 years of age or older, you probably have at least a few, and they will increase in number as you age. They most often appear as bright cherry red, smooth, dome-shaped lesions, one to several millimeters in diameter.

Histologically, cherry angiomas are composed of numerous dilated capillaries lined by endothelial cells (that would be "blood vessel cells" in plain speak). These lesions never turn malignant and rarely require treatment (unless, again, you are vain).

ACROCHORDONS: SKIN TAGS

You commonly find acrochordons, or skin tags, on the face, neck, armpits, and the groin. These brown or flesh-colored growths appear as if they are "hanging" on the skin. They are harmless, but they can become sore from rubs from clothing or jewelry. As your skin ages, skin tags just seem to proliferate. If that bothers you, skin tags can easily be removed.

SEBACEOUS HYPERPLASIA: OIL GLAND LESIONS

Sebaceous hyperplasia bumps, which appear as small, yellowish, elevated growths. They are commonly found on foreheads, cheeks or noses of those over 40. These lesions are actually enlarged sebaceous (oil) glands.

This barnacle, although benign, can be confused with basal cell carcinoma, the most common type of skin cancer! So if you are not sure, be sure to check with your doctor.

LENTIGNES: AGE, SUN, OR LIVER SPOTS

I always hear complaints about these common, pigmented, flat spots. Humans lament, "They make me look old!"

Well, you do tend to see them in older adults, but they are really caused by cumulative sun exposure. They appear on areas of the body that are typically exposed to the sun (face, arms, tops of hands, etc).

Liver spots are not a threat to your health, but there are some fancy lasers that can remove large numbers of these spots (again, a vanity thing).

Liver spots rarely change in color and size, but if they do, they can develop into a malignant melanoma. So if you are suspicious of any changes, immediately consult a medical expert.

VITAMIN D & SUN EXPOSURE

Some member pointed out that there are major health benefits from sun exposure, such as natural vitamin D production - and they are correct.

In fact, below is an article on vitamin D and its health benefits in regards to certain cancers.

However, this kat still believes that if you plan to play outdoors for long, you risk increasing your quotient of skin barnacles (gasp) and may risk experiencing skin cancer as well (yikes). You make the call about the level and type of sunscreen, based on your skin and lifestyle, but do take some precautions, please!!

By the way, Teri had a scare with a melanoma at one point, so she errs on the side of caution and sincerely hopes you will too. She really is a mother hen when it comes to our members!

For more on Vitamin D from the sun: Vitamin D:

http://exchange.healthwell.com/nutritionsciencenews/nsn_Backs/Mar_00/vitamind.cfm

Still purringly yours,
Guido

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