

Keratosis Pilaris

What is it?

Keratosis pilaris is a harmless condition characterized by tiny (1 mm or less) bumps, skin colored or red, that may give the skin a rough texture. It is most common on the outer area of the upper arms. It can also be found on the cheeks, thighs, buttocks, and occasionally the upper back. The bumps are made up of dead skin cells that plug the hair follicle.

Who gets it and why?

It usually starts in childhood or young adulthood, and usually lasts into later life. It is often found in patients with “sensitive skin,” allergies, or asthma, and often runs in families. It can not be spread from one person to another by touching it, nor can one person spread it from one place to another on their own body. It is not a result of inadequate cleaning or other skin care regimens. People with this condition just have the tendency for their skin to form plugs in some regions.

How is it treated?

Because it is harmless, it is not necessary to treat it. Patients should not pick or squeeze the bumps. That may result in scarring.

If patients want treatment, the first line is the daily (or even twice daily) use of moisturizers with mild acids that dissolve the plugs. Examples of effective moisturizers are:

- Urea containing creams such as Carmol 10 or Carmol 20 (the 20 has a higher concentration of acid, and may be more effective).
- Ammonium lactate containing creams such as Lac-Hydrin, Lac-Lotion, LAC Cream, Amlactin.

If using moisturizing cream alone is not sufficient, a prescription cream that is in the family of drugs called “retinoids” can be added. These may be irritating.

Some patients find *gently* scrubbing the involve areas with a Buf-Puf on a regular basis helpful. This can be irritating, and if it produces itching, should be used less often or discontinued.

Some patients notice more bumps, or more redness at the bumps when they begin treatment. This is not harmful, and will go away with continued treatment (it may last months, however).

All treatments for this condition are temporary. Once a good result has been achieved, the creams need to be continued or the bumps will recur.