



Recognizing the warning signs of skin problems

by Dr. Gary Goldenberg, Friday 06/08/2012

Your skin changes as you get older. Many factors influence this change, including sun exposure, genetics, age, and your choice of skin care.

Skin Cancer: The most serious growths that occur as one gets older are skin cancers. The most common skin cancer is basal cell carcinoma. It occurs most frequently on the face, ears, neck, scalp, shoulders and back and can look like a skin-colored or open sore. Squamous cell carcinoma is the second most common type of

skin cancer. It is usually seen on sun-exposed skin and looks like scaly red bumps that may bleed. Melanoma is the most deadly type of skin cancer and can look like dark brown, black, blue or tan spots that may bleed or grow rapidly.

Actinic keratoses: These are precancerous growths that are caused by long-term UV exposure. These growths can become squamous cell carcinoma and may be associated with basal cell carcinoma. They are usually seen on sun-exposed skin and look like scaly patches or bumps, can have the shape of an animal's horn, or can bleed easily. Treatment of these lesions is needed to prevent formation of skin cancer and can be accomplished by freezing (cryosurgery) or topical creams.

Seborrheic keratoses: These growths usually appear after the age of 30 and increase in number as one ages. They look like brown, black or pale-colored growths and have a waxy, scaly, slightly elevated appearance. Sometimes, these growths can peel off or crust off and then come back. These lesions can be surgically removed if irritated or can be removed for cosmetic reasons.

Sebaceous Hyperplasia: This is a common condition in which oil glands become enlarged and appear as yellow, shiny bumps on the face. These lesions can be easily removed for aesthetic reasons.

Cherry angioma: These growths are thought to be genetic and look like cherry-colored bumps. They can become quite large and may bleed when traumatized. The number of these lesions usually increases as one ages. These lesions can be removed by excision or laser surgery.

Skin tags: These growths are small accumulations of skin that may have a stalk and are most common on the eyelids, neck, armpits, upper chest, and groin. They can become irritated and very often are removed for practical and cosmetic reasons.

Xerosis (dry skin): The skin tends to dry out as one ages. Besides age other factors that influence this condition include your skin care style. It's important to not use very hot water in the shower or bath, as this tends to make the skin drier. It's also important to use a moisturizing wash, and not harsh soap. Pat yourself dry and apply a moisturizer right away.

I strongly advise my patients (young and old) to have a yearly full-body skin screening which allows me to catch early stages of skin cancer by having suspicious moles biopsied or simply monitored for changes. Concerning the aesthetic aspects of aging skin, your dermatologist will select the right treatment which will result in a younger, healthier skin appearance. Sun tanning is a big no-no since it only accelerates premature skin aging and it is a known cause of skin cancer. However, cryotherapy, laser therapy, chemical peels, dermabrasion or microdermabrasion are some of the available treatments that when administered by a qualified dermatologist can reverse or slow down skin aging.