


---

# Prevention

## 13 Types of Spots on Your Skin, Including Red, Pink, and Brown, According to Dermatologists

Is that new bump completely harmless—or something to worry about?

BY [JESSICA MIGALA AND KORIN MILLER](#) PUBLISHED: MAR 28, 2025

 MEDICALLY REVIEWED BY [MONA A. GOHARA, M.D.](#) BOARD-CERTIFIED DERMATOLOGIST



Having a new spot show up on your skin can raise a lot of questions. Namely, where did it come from and should you be concerned? But while it's easy to assume the worst, it's important to remember that there are a lot of types of spots on skin that can surface.

For the record, many of these spots, including red dots on skin, are completely harmless. Still, keeping an eye on them and noting any changes is important for your overall skin health, says Ife J. Rodney, M.D., F.A.A.D., founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics.

Spots can also look very different depending on your skin tone. Some pink, red, or brown spots are more obvious on fair to medium skin, but can be harder to detect if you have darker skin, Dr. Rodney says.

**Meet the experts:** Ife J. Rodney, M.D., F.A.A.D., founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics; Gary Goldenberg, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital; Nada Elbuluk, M.D., assistant professor in the department of dermatology at NYU Langone Medical Center; Michelle Pelle, M.D., dermatologist and medical director at MedDerm Associates in San Diego.

That's one of the reasons why it's so crucial for everyone to see a board-certified dermatologist regularly. "Your dermatologist would be able to spot both the obvious as well as the subtle skin findings in different skin types," Dr. Rodney says.

If you have a new spot and you're concerned, it's always a good idea to get it checked out. But while you're waiting for an appointment, scroll down to learn more about some of the most common skin spots, along with the next steps that doctors recommend.

## 1. Cherry angioma

A cherry angioma can look like a little red bump, though it may lie completely flat on your skin. It's actually just a cluster of dilated blood vessels.

"Patients will come in and say they keep getting more and more," says Nada Elbuluk, M.D., assistant professor in the department of dermatology at NYU Langone Medical Center. "And it's true, you get them as you age," she says. They can also run in families—so if your older sister has some, chances are you will, too.

The good news: They're totally benign. If you want them removed, your doc can treat them with intense pulsed light, a light therapy that is similar to a laser treatment, says Michelle Pelle, M.D., dermatologist and medical director at MedDerm Associates in San Diego.

## 2. Psoriasis

Psoriasis is a common autoimmune condition in which the body produces skin cells at a rapid pace, causing them to pile up on the surface. This can result in red spots, raised bumps, and crusty-looking patches of skin, but the exact symptoms can vary depending on your skin color. "Inflammatory skin conditions like psoriasis may appear different in Black patients," Dr. Rodney says. "While psoriasis appears as red, scaly plaques in light skin, you may only see brown plaques in dark skin."

While there are several types of psoriasis, 80 to 90% of people with the disease have plaque psoriasis, according to the National Psoriasis Foundation. These skin lesions can be red or pink in color topped with white or silvery scales that feel itchy or sore. They most often show up on the elbows, knees, lower back, and scalp. If you think you may be dealing with psoriasis, be sure to talk to your doctor, as it typically requires prescribed medications and therapies, depending on the severity.

### **3. Keratosis pilaris (a.k.a. chicken skin)**

If you notice tiny, rough red spots on your skin—especially on your upper arms, thighs, cheeks, or buttocks—you may be dealing with keratosis pilaris, which are plugs of dead skin cells, according to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD). The common condition is totally harmless, but can cause itching and dryness.

If the appearance of them bothers you, treating dry skin will be your best, the AAD says. These bumps often get worse in the winter, thanks to lower humidity in the air. Applying body lotions regularly, or even moisturizers that contain chemical exfoliants such as lactic or salicylic acids (we like this one from CeraVe) can help even out the skin's texture. If general exfoliation and diligent moisturizing habits don't seem to do the trick, talk to your dermatologist about prescription treatments.

### **4. Skin tags**

Skin tags are harmless fleshy growths that often pop up in clusters. They can be annoying, especially if they're located around your bra strap or in a spot that your clothing tends to rub.

That constant friction can make them irritated and inflamed, but if your skin tag is not bothering you, you don't have to remove it. And if they are? Don't try to get rid of them yourself by cutting or scraping them off.

"People will use non-sterile tools and come in with inflamed, irritated, and infected skin," Dr. Elbuluk says. The only safe course is to see your dermatologist, who will either freeze or numb it before snipping it off.

### **5. Folliculitis**

Folliculitis is an infection underneath your hair follicles, according to the AAD. It can look a lot like a sudden acne breakout, but each spot will have a red ring circling it. Unfortunately, the condition can be painful but also not feel like anything at all, as symptoms vary widely. The infection can also make the skin a bit more swollen and itchy.

Anything that damages your hair follicles—say, wearing tight clothing, rubbing your skin often, chafing, shaving, or even hanging out in a dirty hot tub—can make it easier for germs to set up shop and cause an infection, the AAD says.

Folliculitis will usually go away on its own if you stop doing whatever caused it. Applying warm compresses and wearing loose, breathable clothing can also help. But because it can look a lot like acne, talk to your doctor to ensure a proper diagnosis if your symptoms persist.

### **6. Eczema**

Eczema is an umbrella term for a cluster of skin conditions that cause red, itchy, dry, swollen patches anywhere on the body, but particularly the hands, feet, face, cheeks, or insides of the knees or elbows. Eczema can also make the skin look and feel rough and cracked, bumpy, thick or brittle, and blistered.

There are several types of eczema, and they're all triggered by different things—everything from environmental factors to stress to genetics. Atopic dermatitis, the most common type of eczema, is linked to inflammation and the immune system, while contact dermatitis is caused by allergen or irritant (like certain chemicals or acids—say, in your skincare or detergent).

After a proper diagnosis from your dermatologist (this is important, since eczema can look like other conditions), symptoms are often managed through OTC anti-inflammatory ointments and moisturizers or prescription drugs and injections.

## **7. Warts**

If you've ever dealt with a wart, you know just how stubborn they can be. Warts are actually caused by human papillomavirus, which consists of several strains that can affect various parts of your body (yep, including your genitals.)

The good news is, they're typically harmless and painless if they appear on other parts of your body, like your hands or face.

However, plantar warts can develop on the soles of your feet, which can become painful and interfere with running or walking, since you're constantly putting pressure on it.

Resist the urge to yank it off yourself, because that just opens the gates for infection. Instead, talk to your derm, who will first perform a biopsy to make sure it's not skin cancer. Then, he or she can remove it with prescription meds, laser treatment, or by freezing or burning it off. Then, make sure you take these steps to prevent another wart from popping up.

## **8. Dermatofibroma**

You'll find a dermatofibroma most often on your arms and legs, and they can be pink or brown. The bump is made up of fibrous scar tissue, which can form as a reaction to something like a bug bite or ingrown hair.

"A patient will come in and tell me that she's had this bump that's been on her skin for years and it never goes away," Dr. Elbuluk says.

Like a skin tag or cherry angioma, these are perfectly harmless. But because it can look like a mole, you'll want a derm to take a look to determine which one it is, as "moles can change into melanoma, but a dermatofibroma does not," says Dr. Pelle.

## **9. Solar lentigines**

You know them by their more common name: sun spots (or age spots). They look like a cluster of moles that appear in sun-exposed areas like your arms, face, neck, upper chest, and legs. While they're related to how much sun exposure you've gotten, they don't develop into skin cancer, says Dr. Elbuluk.

Still, they're hard to tell apart from moles that could turn cancerous. Also, having a lot of them makes it even harder for you to examine your skin yourself—all the more reason to get an annual skin check from a board-certified dermatologist. If they are simply sun spots and they bother you, here is how to get rid of them.

## **10. Seborrheic keratosis**

Seborrheic keratosis is a dark, scaly, benign crusty overgrowth of the top layer of your skin, explains Dr. Elbuluk. These are common as you reach middle age and beyond. Your derm can remove them by cutting them off, using liquid nitrogen, or treating them with a laser.

## 11. Tinea infection

Tinea can look like a small red birthmark or discoloration—almost like a stain on your skin. But these spots are actually a kind of fungal infection, including ringworm and athlete's foot, according to the National Institutes of Health. Tinea comes in various shapes and sizes, and the kind that infects your skin can spread (and infect other people) or become worse if not treated.

Fortunately, treatment is often as simple as washing the infected area with a prescription soap or shampoo, which your doctor can hook you up with.

## 12. Basal or squamous cell carcinoma

Yes, this is one of the bad ones—but many people don't realize there are multiple types of skin cancer, Dr. Elbuluk says. "I'll ask if someone has ever had skin cancer, and they will tell me, 'No, just a basal cell.'"

Basal and squamous cell carcinomas are the most common types of skin cancer; more than 3 million people are diagnosed with them each year, according to the American Cancer Society. Unlike a benign mole, they often appear red, scaly, or pearly in appearance. While they're not as deadly as melanoma, Dr. Elbuluk still recommends telling your dermatologist if a mole looks odd or is growing, changing, or starts to itch and bleed.

## 13. Melanoma

Melanoma isn't as common as basal or squamous cell carcinomas—it only accounts for about 1% of skin cancers—but it's far more deadly if you don't catch it early, says the ACS.

To spot melanoma, use the ABCDE trick: Look for moles that are asymmetrical, have an irregular or less defined border, appear uneven in color, are greater than the size of a pea in diameter, and that evolve over time. (These melanoma pictures can help you visualize each of these changes.)

That's why taking note of any new spots on your skin is so important. If you catch a suspicious mole early enough, your dermatologist can remove it and prevent the cancer from spreading to other parts of your body—which can save your life.

### How concerned should you be about new spots on your skin?

New spots can show up here and there, and these shouldn't automatically be a reason for panic, says Gary Goldenberg, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital.

"It's normal to develop new growths or spots on the skin," he says. The big difference in how concerned you should be is if a new spot sticks around or increases in size, Dr. Goldenberg says. "It doesn't necessarily mean that the spot is cancerous, but it's certainly possible," he says. "This is especially true for those with a history of UV/sun exposure."

### Signs to get a new spot checked out

The ABCDE criteria we mentioned above is important, but it's not the only thing to have in mind with new spots, according to Dr. Goldenberg. He also recommends getting a spot checked out if it comes along with these symptoms:

- It's not going away.
- It's getting bigger.
- It's painful or uncomfortable.

- It itches.
- It's bleeding.
- It's a change in a long-standing spot.

"All are important signs that the spot should be checked by your dermatologist," Dr. Goldenberg says.

As for how long to give a new spot before having it evaluated, Dr. Goldenberg says you can wait a few weeks, unless you're uncomfortable. (In that case, get it checked out sooner.)

### What will a doctor do?

There are a few things your dermatologist will do during your appointment. "A visual exam is the first step," Dr. Goldenberg says. That means physically looking at your spot, along with using a device called a dermatoscope to get a closer look. "Think of it as a special magnifier, which may give more accurate information," Dr. Goldenberg says.

If the spot looks suspicious, your doctor may do a skin biopsy. "This involves gentle removal of some or all of the spot," Dr. Goldenberg explains. (Your skin will be numbed up beforehand.) After that, the tissue is sent to a lab to be analyzed, and your doctor will receive the results in a week or two. You can discuss specific next steps from there, if they're needed.

Additional reporting by Alisa Hrustic

Medically reviewed by Mona A. Gohara, M.D., Board-Certified Dermatologist

Mona Gohara, M.D. is a Yale-trained, board-certified dermatologist, Oberlin College-bred feminist, medical media expert, and member of the ELLE Beauty Advisory Board. Mona enjoys educating on skin health, skin cancer, skin of color, and sun protection. She has done this through writing, lecturing on the local, national, and international levels, and by engaging popular media. Mona is an active member of the American Academy of Dermatology, where she chaired the social media task force, The Women's Dermatologic Society where she serves as president, and The American Society for Dermatologic Surgery, where she chairs the DEI Work Group.

Source: <https://www.prevention.com/health/a64309869/types-of-spots-on-skin/>