

Health Tips

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with

Dr. D


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Health Tip: What are Skin Tags?



Skin tags, known in doctor language as acrochordons, are very common benign skin growths, most commonly occurring in the skin folds (neck, armpits, and groin). They are usually flesh colored and may appear similar to a small piece of hanging skin. Inspection often shows them to be "pedunculated", that is, projecting from the surrounding skin from a narrow stalk. While usually quite small, a millimeter or two across, on occasion they can be as large as a grape.

What causes skin tags? The reasons that skin tags develop are not well understood. Although they occur frequently in perfectly normal people, they are prone to develop in the following circumstances:

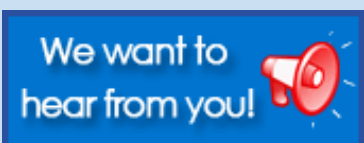
- From chaffing and irritation from skin rubbing together or against clothing.
- Accompanying aging, with most developing in those who are middle-aged or older
- During pregnancy, due to hormonal influences
- In diabetics, particularly those with Type 2 (adult onset) diabetes
- In association with obesity

Do skin tags cause any symptoms? Skin tags are usually noticed coincidentally, since they are not associated with any particular symptoms. They can, however, become irritated and may even bleed from rubbing against adjacent skin, jewelry, or clothing.

How are skin tags treated? As long as the skin tag is not growing or changing in appearance, it is acceptable to just leave it alone. People sometimes choose to have them removed if they are cosmetically unacceptable or if they become irritated, for example, when rubbing against the collar. In the doctor's office, these growths may be removed by freezing (cryotherapy), electrical burn (cautery), or by cutting the lesion off at its base.

Is it OK to remove skin tags myself? Several web sites provide information for self treatment of skins tags---tying a string around the stalk to cut off the blood supply, use of OTC freezing systems designed to remove warts, etc. In

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most cases, however, it's best for a doctor to take care of skin tags. Since they can be located in areas of the body that would be awkward to take care of oneself, self-treatment can be difficult. Some of the self-care methods mentioned, e.g. snipping the skin tag at its base, could lead to complications including bleeding, infection or scarring. Additionally, there is the possibility that the skin tag is something more serious, such as skin cancer. Since these lesions can be quickly and almost painlessly removed in the doctor's office anyway, it is best to have a physician's evaluation.

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