

## **Ask Dr. Mikell**

By Dr. Oswald Mikell

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American Board of Dermatology | American Board of Cosmetic Surgery | Physician of the Year 2008

#### **Common Benign Growths**

Your skin is subject to a variety of common benign growths. In fact, most people develop at least one type of skin growth at some point in their lives, especially older adults. Although most skin growths are painless and require no treatment, you may decide to have them removed if they become irritated by clothing or for cosmetic reasons

#### **Q: What can be done about skin tags?**

**A:** Skin tags occur in almost half the population, most commonly in middle age. You should not attempt home remedies. The treatments for skin tags are simple and effective, but to avoid unnecessary health risks, they should be performed by a physician.

#### **Q. How can I tell if my moles are dangerous?**

**A:** Recognizing changes in your moles is crucial in detecting malignant melanoma, and other cancerous skin growths at its earliest stage of development. Look for these warning signs: asymmetry, ragged or irregular borders, or a change in color or size. If you notice any changes, make an appointment to have them checked right away.

#### **Q: Recently I have developed some pale, or colored warty growths on my face and back. What is it?**

**A:** They may be may be seborrheic keratoses. They have a waxy, scaly, slightly elevated appearance. Occasionally, they appear singly, but multiple growths are more common. These growths are normally painless and require no treatment. You may decide, however, to have them removed if they become irritated by clothing or for cosmetic reasons. Typically, seborrheic keratoses don't become cancerous, but they can look like skin cancer. You should have your dermatologist check to determine exactly what it is.

#### **Q: How do I know if a cyst is harmful?**

**A:** Many cysts aren't harmful, but you may want to have them removed for cosmetic reasons, or to prevent them from becoming irritated or an abscess. Your dermatologist can remove them in the office.

#### **Q: Are freckles considered skin growths?**

**A:** Freckles (Ephelides) are not growths per se; they represent increased pigment in the skin, and they tend to darken in the summer with increased sun exposure and lighten in the winter. When present in large numbers, they indicate excessive sun damage and an increased risk of sun-induced skin cancer. Topical bleaching creams, chemical peels, or laser and light treatments can lighten freckles for cosmetic purposes.

#### **Q: What is Dermatographism?**

**A:** Dermatographism means the ability to write on the skin. With this condition, the skin is sensitive to touch and pressure, as well as scratching. The areas of skin that are touched or scratched get a raised, red and itchy rash. If dermatographism is not particularly bothersome, then no treatment is needed. Symptoms can be decreased with the use of various antihistamines – those containing hydroxyzine seem to work especially well.

Most skin growths are benign and harmless, but differentiation from malignancy is essential. Call Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry (843) 689-5259 on Hilton Head Island or 843-705-0840 in Bluffton / Okatie. Our experienced staff will be able to provide proper treatment.