

Keratosis Pilaris

What is it?

Keratosis (carrot-o-sis) pilaris is a common rash found on the outer parts of the upper arms, thighs and cheeks. You will see flesh-colored or slightly red, rough, tiny bumps.

Keratosis pilaris can be itchy at times, but mostly it is bothersome due to its appearance. It is caused by a plug of dead skin cells that forms around a hair follicle. These “plugs” give the skin a sandpapery or “goose-flesh” feeling. Keratosis pilaris is usually worse during the winter months, and is most commonly seen in children and young adults. Often, the skin is also dry.

How is it treated?

Keratosis pilaris is not harmful. Treatment is usually done only for cosmetic reasons. Each person responds differently to therapies, but most commonly, lubricants or mild peeling agents in the form of creams or lotions are used.

Lubricants may help with the dryness, but do not tend to clear up the bumps. Urea preparations, such as Carmol are often used as a lubricant. Mild peeling agents work best, because they open the plugged hair follicles by removing the excess skin. These can be purchased over the counter from a pharmacy or drug store, and include lactic acid creams (such as Lachydrin, Lachydrin V or Amlactin) and other alpha-hydroxy acid (AHA) creams or lotions.

Occasionally, a prescription for Retin-A is given.

Other skin care directions

Continue the prescribed therapy on a regular basis, or the keratosis pilaris will come back. It is important to use mild soap while bathing (such as unscented Dove, Oil of Olay, Cetaphil or Oilatum), and avoid soaping the affected areas on the arms and legs as much as possible. For most children, treatment is unnecessary.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Division of Dermatology, (206) 987-2158
- Your Child's Health Care Provider

Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call Marketing Communications at (206) 987-5205.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.