

Seborrhoeic Keratoses

Also known as seborrhoeic warts (although they are not warts), or as senile warts (which in this context means old people's warts but I think this is both inaccurate and rude)

These are one of the commonest benign skin growths in humans

It is genetic what age people start getting them – some will get them in their 20s, but a recent survey of 50 year olds showed that 100% of them had at least one (whether they had previously been aware of it or not).

They are probably not related to sun damage, but we cannot be certain

They are not infectious or contagious and cannot be spread on your body by rubbing or scratching. They cannot be “passed on” to other people.

They can take any form from flat to very raised, and any colour from white to flesh coloured to yellow to brown to black.

They characteristically have a well-defined edge, and a roughened surface (unless they have been “polished” by rubbing against clothing).

On the rough raised ones, bits will often drop off – this is normal, and doesn't matter at all. You can pick bits off them if they seem loose and this is fine.

They occasionally get a bit inflamed and itchy – this may be normal, and should go away within 2 weeks, but if in doubt please come back and see me.

They do not need any treatment unless they are causing symptoms. I cannot treat them on the NHS in the absence of symptoms. However, if you are very bothered by ones that are not on your face, I can flatten them a bit with a quick spray of liquid nitrogen. This will not get rid of them completely, but will flatten them down a bit for a while. It may also leave permanent white marks, and make them come back in funny shapes, which is why I do not offer this treatment on the face.

How to recognise possible skin cancers

The simplest thing to remember is that I always want to check any “ugly duckling”.

This is any skin lesion that catches your eye in the mirror and makes you think “what's that?” This includes any lesion that doesn't look quite like any of the other moles or skin blemishes you may have. Or it may be one that is new or changing.

An ugly duckling may be any colour – commonly pink, purple, black, brown, or several different colours.

If you are worried you may have a suspicious skin lesion, please tell the receptionist when you book your appointment that this is what you are worried about, so you can be booked straight in to the skin clinic with me (Dr Whybrew).