

Skin Lumps and Bumps: An A-Z Guide

Warts, cysts, moles, hives: What are they? What are treatments?

A mysterious bump has shown up on your skin and you have no idea what it is — or if you should be worried. Skin lumps and bumps on or just below the skin are common, and most of the time, they're harmless. However, some may be painful or be a symptom of a more serious condition.

"Skin bumps vary in appearance and number depending on the cause," says [Zhaoyi Qin, MD](#), an [internal medicine physician](#) at [Scripps Clinic Torrey Pines](#). "Most don't need treatment, but speak with your doctor if you're concerned about any changes in your bumps or the overall condition of your skin."

Here's a look at some of the most common skin bumps and what to do about them.

Cherry angiomas

Those small, smooth red bumps that suddenly appear on your skin — especially on your torso — are most likely cherry angiomas. They can range from a tiny dot to the size of a pencil top eraser. You're more prone to develop them after age 40.

Cherry angiomas are not a health concern and don't need treatment. However, if their appearance bothers you, removal is an option. A doctor can shave them off or use a laser to remove them. Depending on the size of the angioma, you may have a scar.

Cysts

Cysts are small pouches of tissue filled with fluid that form beneath the skin's surface. Infection, irritation or clogged oil glands all may cause cysts. Most cysts are harmless and rarely cause pain unless they become inflamed or infected, or press on nerves. Ganglion cysts, which often form on top of a joint or tendon on the wrist or fingers, may cause discomfort or weakness in the affected area.

"Cysts that cause problems may need treatment," says Dr. Qin. "Often, draining the cyst through a tiny incision may provide relief. If the cyst is inflamed, a cortisone injection may help. Infected cysts may respond to antibiotics."

Surgery to remove the cyst is an option if other treatments are not successful, or if the cyst returns; surgery usually requires only a small incision in the skin.

Dermatofibromas

These round, reddish-brown or purple spots usually appear on the arms or legs and feel like hard bumps. The cause is unknown, but they sometimes appear after an injury to the area.

Dermatofibromas contain scar tissue and typically aren't harmful or painful, though they may itch or be tender to touch. If they bother you, a doctor can remove them.

Folliculitis

As the name suggests, folliculitis is an infection of the hair follicles, most often on the scalp, face and legs. It often looks like a rash of tiny, itchy red bumps or blisters. While it is more common in people who have diabetes or a compromised immune system, folliculitis can affect anyone.

Depending on the cause, treatments may include antibiotics applied directly to the skin or taken by mouth, or antifungal medicine if a fungal infection is suspected. After treatment, it is helpful to keep the area clean and avoid further irritation to the skin.

Hives

Hives are red, raised, itchy and painful bumps that appear suddenly on the skin. Often caused by an allergic reaction or by stress, most hives last several hours or several days. Antihistamines for hives work by suppressing the allergic reaction that triggers their production. Cool compresses applied to the skin may soothe the reaction.

“Identifying and avoiding whatever triggers your hives are the best ways to prevent them,” says Dr. Qin. “If hives last for more than a few days, occur often, or are accompanied by difficulty breathing or other symptoms, see your doctor.”

Keloids

When scar tissue continues to grow beyond an injured area, it can form a large bump on the skin called a keloid. Though keloids are not harmful, people may choose to have them removed because they itch or are unattractive. Treatment options may include surgery, laser therapy, steroid injections or cryotherapy (freezing).

Lipomas

Lipomas are soft tissue tumors that usually develop slowly. You may have a single lipoma or several. They feel soft and rubbery, and most often affect the trunk and shoulders.

Lipomas themselves are usually harmless. However, one that is painful or grows quickly may be cancerous, so it’s a good idea to have a lipoma checked out by a doctor. Lipomas also may cause problems if they press on a nerve.

If needed, there are several options to remove a lipoma. It may be squeezed out through a small incision in the skin or surgically removed. Liposuction can remove the lipoma through suction. Lipotherapy dissolves the lipoma using a drug called deoxycholic acid (Kybella) injected directly into the lipoma and leaves no scar.

Moles

Moles come in many shapes, sizes and colors, and they’re generally harmless unless you notice the shape, size or color is changing. This can be an early sign of skin cancer.

Get a [skin check](#) every year and let your doctor know right away about any changes in the appearance or texture of a mole, any bleeding or itching, or any new moles. Moles that are precancerous can usually be easily removed in your doctor’s office.

[Non-cancerous moles](#) can be easily removed with a minor surgical procedure.

Warts

Warts are small growths on the skin caused by the [human papillomavirus \(HPV\)](#). They often appear on the hands and fingers and may feel rough, although some are smooth. Because they are caused by a virus, warts are contagious and may spread to other areas or to other people.

Warts often go away on their own, but wart treatment is sometimes necessary. See a [dermatologist](#) if you have warts that are painful, itchy, bleed, develop on your genitals or spread to other parts of the body, or otherwise bother you. There are a variety of treatments that can remove warts.