

Solar Keratosis: The facts

What is a Solar Keratosis (SK)?

Solar Keratosis (SK), also known as Actinic Keratosis, is a common lesion which occurs in sun-exposed skin.¹

Solar Keratosis is usually found on the face, back of the hands and forearms, and can present as single or multiple lesions (Solar Keratoses plural).¹

Solar Keratoses range in size from being as tiny as a pinhead to several centimetres across.² They may be light or dark, tan, pink or a combination of these and can have a scaly or crusty feel to the touch.²



Single SK on nose

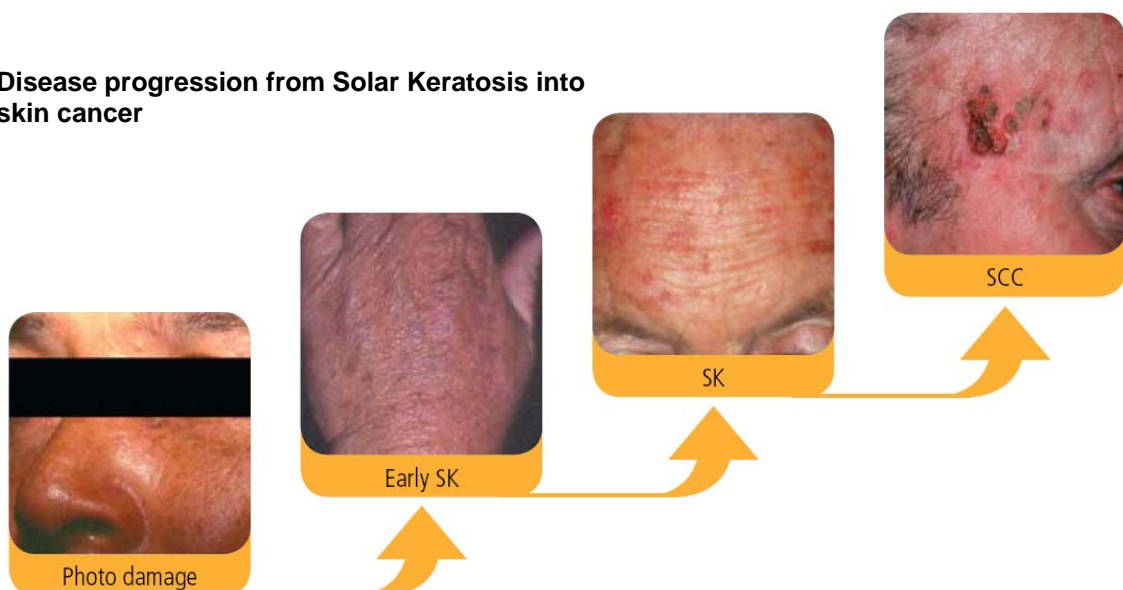


Multiple SKs on scalp

While Solar Keratoses themselves are non-cancerous, they can potentially lead to malignant skin cancers such as squamous cell carcinoma (SCC),^{3,4} if left untreated. Up to 16% of Solar Keratoses can potentially progress to squamous cell carcinomas per year² and up to 97% of these skin cancers are associated with a neighbouring Solar Keratosis.⁵

Furthermore, people with more than 10 Solar Keratoses have a 14% chance of developing a squamous cell carcinoma within five years.⁵

Disease progression from Solar Keratosis into skin cancer



How common is Solar Keratosis and who can it affect?

Solar Keratosis is the most common form of pre-cancerous skin lesion.⁶ Approximately 40-60% of the Australian Caucasian population over 40-years of age have at least one lesion.² Individuals with Solar Keratosis have an average of six to eight lesions.^{4,5} There is a greater prevalence of Solar Keratoses among men than women.⁵

Despite increased sun awareness, Solar Keratoses are becoming more common as people are living longer and are increasingly favouring outdoor activities.⁶

The main risk factor for the development of Solar Keratosis is increased sun exposure.² However, fair-skinned (or Caucasian) people are particularly vulnerable², as well as those with weaker immune systems or certain genetic conditions, such as people with an extraordinary sensitivity to sunlight (xeroderma pigmentosum).⁶

How is Solar Keratosis treated?

There are a number of treatment options currently available for Solar Keratosis which include:

- Cryotherapy (liquid nitrogen freezing) - a common treatment option for single Solar Keratosis lesions; however, it is destructive and the freezing can leave hypopigmented marks (loss of skin colour) on the treated area.⁴
- Another treatment for single Solar Keratosis lesions is surgical excision of the lesion; however it requires local anaesthesia and can cause scarring.⁴
- Various topical treatments also exist which may have a perceived advantage over invasive/surgical treatments for managing lesions that may exist below the skin surface and are invisible to the naked eye⁴; however some treatments are known to cause painful inflammation and erosion of the skin.^{2,4,7}