

KELOIDS

What is a Keloid?

A keloid is greatly enlarged scar that projects above the skin surface. Skin heals by formation of scar tissue, which at first is often red and somewhat prominent. As times passes, a scar usually becomes flat. Unfortunately, sometimes scars enlarge to form firm, smooth, hard growths called keloids.

What causes Keloids?

No one knows why keloids form. Although most persons never form keloids, other develop them after minor injuries or even insect bites or pimples. Keloids may form on any part of the body, although the upper chest and upper back are especially prone to keloid formation. Dark-skinned persons form keloids more easily than Caucasians. Keloids are a cosmetic nuisance and never become malignant.

Treatment

There is no satisfactory treatment for keloids. Surgical removal of a keloid usually results in a second keloid that is worse than the first. The best treatment is to inject a long-acting cortisone into the keloid itself. The cortisone acts slowly, and the keloid should be checked in 6 to 8 weeks. At this time, most keloids are flatter, and the injection is repeated, sometimes with a stronger cortisone. Although occasionally a single injection results in satisfactory flattening of a keloid, usually several injections treatment are needed.

Tretinoin (trade name: Retin-A) cream applied twice daily for a least 3 months often helps to flatten keloids. Because tretinoin cream irritates the skin, start by using it only once every other day. As the skin adjusts, apply it once daily. After another 2 to 3 weeks, use it two times a day. Continue the twice-daily applications for at least 3 months.

Covering a keloid with silicone gel sheeting is often effective in flattening a keloid. How this happens is not known. The sheeting must be kept in place for 12 to 24 hours a day; it is customary to remove it once a day for cleaning and reapplying. Generally, it takes 2 to 3 months for the keloid to flatten.