

KERATOSIS PILARIS

What is keratosis pilaris?

Keratosis pilaris is a common, harmless skin condition that causes dry, rough patches and tiny bumps, usually on the upper arms, thighs, cheeks or buttocks. The bumps generally don't hurt or itch. Keratosis pilaris is often considered a variant of normal skin. It can't be cured or prevented. But you can treat it with moisturizers and prescription creams to help improve the appearance of the skin.

Keratosis pilaris can occur at any age, but it's more common in young children.

Signs and symptoms include:

- Painless tiny bumps, typically on the upper arms, thighs, cheeks or buttocks
- Dry, rough skin in the areas with bumps
- Worsening when seasonal changes cause low humidity and skin tends to be drier
- Sandpaper-like bumps resembling goose flesh

What causes keratosis pilaris?

Keratosis pilaris results from the buildup of keratin — a hard protein that protects skin from harmful substances and infection. The keratin forms a scaly plug that blocks the opening of the hair follicle. Usually many plugs form, causing patches of rough, bumpy skin.

No one knows exactly why keratin builds up. But it may occur in association with genetic diseases or with other skin conditions, such as atopic dermatitis. Dry skin tends to worsen this condition.

How is it treated?

Gradually, keratosis pilaris usually clears up on its own. In the meantime, you might use any of the various products available to help improve the appearance of affected skin. If moisturizing and other self-care measures don't help, your doctor may prescribe medicated creams.

- **Creams to remove dead skin cells.** Creams containing alpha hydroxy acid, lactic acid, salicylic acid or urea help loosen and remove dead skin cells. They also moisturize and soften dry skin. Depending on their strength, these creams (topical exfoliants) are available over-the-counter or with a prescription. Your doctor can advise you on the best option and how often to apply. The acids in these creams may cause redness, stinging or skin irritation, so they aren't recommended for young children.
- **Creams to prevent plugged follicles.** Creams derived from vitamin A (topical retinoids) work by promoting cell turnover and preventing plugged hair follicles. Tretinoin (Retin-A, Renova, Avita) and tazarotene (Avage, Tazorac) are examples of topical retinoids. These products can irritate and dry the skin. Also, if you're pregnant or nursing, your doctor may suggest delaying topical retinoid therapy or choosing another treatment

Using medicated cream regularly may improve the appearance of the skin. But if you stop, the condition returns. And even with treatment, keratosis pilaris tends to persist for years.