

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 months pass, a scar usually becomes flat. Unfortunately, sometimes scars enlarge to form firm, smooth, hard growths call keloids.

What causes keloids?

No one knows why keloids form. While most persons never form keloids, others develop them after minor injuries and even after 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 do not become malignant (cancer).

General Information About Treatment:

There is no completely satisfactory treatment for keloids. Even after an apparent cure, they sometimes return. If this happens, it will usually occur within one to two years. Treatment is easiest for keloids of the earlobe and is most difficult for keloids of the chest and shoulders. Treatment is even more difficult in patients with multiple keloids and in patients with keloids that have returned after prior therapy.

What types of treatment are available?

Injection of cortisone-like medications:

This technique often causes marked improvement, particularly in relatively small keloids. A complete cure however, does not usually occur. The medication is injected with a syringe and needle directly into the keloid. It usually will need to be repeated several times on a monthly basis.

A not uncommon side effect of cortisone treatment is for the surrounding skin to become lighter in color than normal and to develop a slight depression (loss of thickness). This will usually resolve with a year.

The amount of cortisone used will not cause health problems. However, if you have diabetes, a history of stomach or duodenal ulcer, tuberculosis, or high blood pressure, be sure to let Dr. Kern know.

Surgical removal:

This technique is often required, especially if injection of steroids is not feasible or is unsuccessful. It is the usual treatment of very large keloids on the trunk and of most keloids on the face. The disadvantage of surgical removal is the the keloid may occasionally re-grow to an even bigger size than it was prior to the surgery. Sometimes, surgical removal is combined with cortisone injections before or after surgery.

Other treatments:

Excision of keloids using a laser is possible, but the results are no better than other techniques and may even be worse. In unusual cases, radiation (x-ray) treatment may be tried.