Epidermoid Cyst

An **epidermoid cyst** (epidermal/keratin cyst) is a non-cancerous, round lump under the skin. The cyst is filled with keratin, a protein found in the skin, hair, and nails. They often grow slowly and forms when skin cells grow into a deeper layer of skin instead of shedding. This can happen if a hair follicle is blocked or the skin is injured. Having these cysts may be common in your family.

Signs and Symptoms

You may notice:

- A smooth, firm lump under the skin
- A lump on the face, neck, scalp, or upper body
- A lump that moves slightly when pressed
- A small opening in the center of the lump
- Redness, swelling, or pain if the cyst is irritated or infected
- Thick, white drainage if the cyst breaks open

Treatment

Treatment depends on your symptoms. No treatment is needed if the cyst is not causing problems.

- A warm compress may help with swelling
- A steroid shot may help lower swelling
- Draining the cyst may give short-term relief, but the cyst may come back
- Surgery is the best way to remove the cyst, but surgery cannot be done when the cyst is swollen or inflamed
- Antibiotics may be used if there is an infection

Home Care

To help care for your cyst:

- **Do not** squeeze or pop it. This can cause infection or scarring
- Keep the area clean
- **Avoid** rubbing or pressure on the cyst
- Use a warm compress if the area feels sore

When to Call

Call your provider if the cyst:

- Becomes painful
- Grows quickly
- Keeps coming back

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8548