Understanding Common Benign Skin Growths

During your skin exam, your dermatologist may have talked about common skin spots or bumps. These growths are benign, which means they are not cancer. Most do not need treatment. Read this handout to learn more about common benign skin growths.

Freckles
Freckles are small, flat, tan or light brown spots. They appear on the face, arms, and shoulders. Sun exposure can make them darker. Freckles are harmless. If you do not like how they look, laser or fading treatments may help. Insurance does not cover these treatments.

Lentigines
Lentigines are flat brown spots caused by years of sun exposure. They often appear on the face, hands, and upper back. Lentigines are not skin cancer and do not turn into skin cancer. They can look like other skin spots, so it is a good idea to have them checked. Treatments such as freezing, lasers, or bleaching creams may lighten them. Insurance does not cover these treatments.

Dermatofibromas
Dermatofibromas are harmless firm, round bumps that appear on the arms or legs. They may be brown, pink, or red. The bumps may form after an insect bite or minor skin injury. They do not need treatment. If they bother you, they can be removed with surgery. Insurance may only cover removal if the bump causes pain or changes.

Sebaceous Hyperplasia
These are small yellow bumps that appear on the forehead or cheeks when oil glands become larger with age. They are harmless but can look like skin cancer. Treatment options include electrocautery, laser treatment, or minor surgery. Insurance does not cover these treatments.

Moles (Nevi)
Moles can be flat or raised. They may be flesh-colored, tan, brown, or dark brown. Most moles are harmless. Your dermatologist checks moles for changes in size, shape, or color. If a mole looks concerning, a biopsy may be done. Normal moles can be removed for cosmetic reasons, but insurance does not cover removal.

Milia
Milia are tiny white bumps that appear when dead skin cells become trapped under the skin. These bumps are often found around the eyes or cheeks. Milia is harmless and often will go away on their own. A dermatologist can remove them if needed. Insurance does not cover removal.

Lipomas
A lipoma is a soft lump made of fatty tissue under the skin. It often moves when pressed. Lipomas grow slowly and are not dangerous. Most do not need treatment. Surgery may be done if the lipoma causes pain or other problems.

Epidermoid Cysts
Epidermoid cysts are firm bumps under the skin. Some have a small opening in the center. They form when a hair follicle or oil gland becomes blocked. These cysts are benign but can become swollen or infected. A dermatologist may drain or remove them if needed. If the cyst is not causing problems, removal is usually considered cosmetic.

Skin Tags
Skin tags are soft growths that hang from the skin and form where skin rubs together, such as the neck, armpits, or groin. Skin tags are very common and harmless. They can be removed if they catch on clothing or cause irritation. Insurance may only cover removal if there is a medical reason.

Cherry Angiomas
Cherry angiomas are small, bright red spots made of blood vessels that appear on the chest, back, or stomach as you age. They are harmless and do not need treatment. Laser treatment or electrocautery can remove them. Insurance does not cover these treatments.

Seborrheic Keratoses
Seborrheic keratoses are rough growths that may look like they are stuck onto the skin. They can be tan, brown, or black. They are common with age and are not cancer. These growths can become itchy or irritated. They can be removed by freezing or shaving if needed. Insurance does not cover removal for cosmetic reasons.

When to Call
Call your provider if you notice:

- A spot that changes in size, shape, or color
- A growth that bleeds, itches, or causes pain
- A new spot that concerns you

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#8545