Skin Tags and Skin Cancer: What You Should Know

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A skin tag is a narrow stalk of hanging skin that bulges at the end. Skin tags are usually flesh-colored and can develop anywhere on the body, but are most often found in areas where the skin rubs together, such as the neck and armpit.

Skin cancer is a disease in which malignant, or cancerous, cells form in the tissues of the skin. Although skin tags are tumors of the skin that consist of fibers and ducts, nerve cells, fat cells, and a covering epidermis, they are benign, or noncancerous. It is extremely rare that a skin tag becomes precancerous or cancerous – however, if your skin tag, as with any skin lesions, changes color or shape, it is recommended that you contact your dermatologist.

Up to 46 percent of the population in the United States has skin tags, according to the National Institutes of Health. They are most common among men and women past middle age, overweight people, diabetics, and pregnant women. Some people appear to inherit an increased susceptibility to skin tags. Risk factors associated with skin cancer, such as exposure to sunlight or a lighter natural skin color, are not associated with skin tags.

Because skin tags are harmless and painless, most people don’t need treatment for them. However, doctors can remove the skin tags by freezing them with liquid nitrogen, performing electrocautery, or numbing and cutting off the skin tags if the patient is self-conscious about them.

While skin tags are not cancerous, it is important to keep an eye on any growths or changes in the skin. Most doctors recommend doing your own skin check at least once a month, ideally after a shower or bath and in a well-lit room, as well as having a full skin exam by a physician at least once a year.

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