

Keratosis Pilaris

What it is?

Keratosis pilaris (ker-uh-TOE-siss pill-AIR-iss) is a common rash. It is usually found on the outer areas of the upper arms, thighs, and cheeks. It looks and feels like rough, small bumps. They might be the same color as the skin or slightly red.

Keratosis pilaris is sometimes a little itchy, but it is harmless and does not cause pain. It bothers some people because of how it looks.

What causes it?

It is caused by a plug of dead skin cells that forms around a hair follicle. These “plugs” give the skin a sandpapery or “goose flesh” feeling. Keratosis pilaris is usually worse during the winter months. Often, the skin around the bumps is dry.

How do you treat it?

Avoiding things that dry out the skin (like long, hot showers and harsh soaps) and using moisturizers on your child’s skin every day will help. This does not usually make the bumps go away completely, but it often improves the way they look.

Moisturizers

For many children, using a non-irritating lotion or cream will help enough. Your child should use a moisturizer 2 times a day, including right after bathing. Examples of moisturizers to try are Cetaphil, Eucerin, CeraVe or Vanicream.

Peeling lotions or creams

For older children and adults, mild peeling creams may be helpful to prevent skin plugs from forming. You can buy some of these at the drugstore. For some, you will need a prescription from your child’s provider.

Most of the time, your child’s healthcare team will recommend:

- Lotions or creams with lactic acid, like Lac-Hydrin or AmLactin
- Lotions or creams with alpha hydroxy acid, like Eucerin Plus Intensive Repair
- Lotions or creams with salicylic acid like CeraVe SA

Sometimes, your child’s health care team will order a prescription for a topical retinoid cream, lotion or gel, like Retin-A. These are best for older children, since they may irritate the skin of younger children.

To Learn More

- Dermatology
206-987-2158
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



Seattle Children’s offers free interpreter services for patients, family members and legal representatives who are deaf or hard of hearing or speak a language other than English. Seattle Children’s will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201. This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children’s. However, your needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your healthcare provider.

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