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Keratosis Pilaris

Keratosis Pilaris is a skin condition commonly seen on the upper arms, buttocks and thighs. The skin cells that normally flake off as a fine dust from your skin form plugs in the hair follicles. These appear as small pimples that have a dry "sandpaper" feeling. They are usually white but sometimes rather red. They usually don't itch or hurt.

Keratosis Pilaris is particularly common in teenagers on the upper arms. It may occur in babies where it tends to be most obvious on the cheeks. It may remain for years but generally disappears gradually before age 30. Pityriasis folliculitis may look similar.

Keratosis Pilaris is unsightly but completely harmless. It tends to run in families that are prone to a common type of dry skin ("Ichthyosis Vulgaris"). It is usually worse during the winter months or other times of low humidity when skin dries out and may worsen during pregnancy or after childbirth.

When Keratosis Pilaris occurs on the cheeks, very often the affected areas are red as well as feeling rough. There is a rare variation of it cause hair loss ("keratosis pilaris atrophicans faciei"), what looks like pitted acne scars (atrophoderma vermiculatum) or causes the outer eyebrows to fall out ("ulerythema ophyrogenes"). Lichen spinulosis is similar to Keratosis Pilaris but more widespread and patchy.

Treatment of Keratosis Pilaris is not necessary, and unfortunately often has disappointing results. With persistence, most people can get very satisfactory improvement. Initial treatment should be intensive moisturizing. Try a cream such as Amlactin, Vaseline or Cerave after bathing, and re-apply the cream again several times daily.

More aggressive home treatment can be done if you or your skin can tolerate it. You can remove the plugged pores by taking long, hot soaking tub baths and then scrubbing the areas with a coarse washcloth or stiff brush to remove the plugs or rubbing with a pumice stone or a "Buf-Puf" in the shower or bath.

Prescription medicines that may help include antibiotics (Erythromycin, Bactrim) if the spots are very red. **Tazorac is the newest and perhaps strongest treatment yet. It is extremely expensive, and mildly irritating to the skin in use.**