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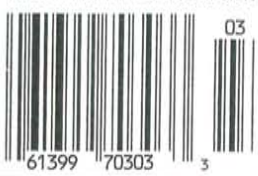
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Rough spot

Beat keratosis pilaris to the punch.

BY KERRY FREEK



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errified by the idea of wearing a sleeveless top? Self-conscious about redness and bumps on your upper arms? You may be one of many people who suffer from keratosis pilaris, commonly known as “chicken skin.”

“Roughness on the arms and sometimes on the cheeks and thighs can be disturbing – and background redness can be embarrassing,” says Dr. Mark Lupin, a dermatologist at Cosmedica Laser Centre in Victoria, B.C. “On the cheeks, keratosis pilaris may look like acne because of its roughness. Occasionally, itchiness may complicate the condition on the arms.”

Commonly mistaken for acne, keratosis pilaris is actually plugged follicular pores that appear as bumps with or without surrounding redness. It's a condition that affects 50 to 80 per cent of adolescents and up to 40 per cent of adults, and is particularly common in those prone to eczema, hay fever and asthma.

While most types of keratosis pilaris and seborrheic keratoses (brown age spots appearing anywhere on the body) don't pose a health risk, actinic keratosis, which also appears as rough and bumpy patches, can be precancerous sunspots, and you should see your doctor immediately.

"While there is no cure for keratosis pilaris, other than natural improvement as you get older, it can be improved," says Dr. Lupin. He recommends avoiding irritants to the skin, such as drying soaps and loofahs, and maximizing the use of moisturizers. "Gentle cleansers and bland moisturizers are first steps," he says, recommending both Cetaphil cream and Glaxal Base cream.

To smoothe and soften the bumps, use keratolytic agents, such as alpha hydroxy acids, available in products such as LacHydrin lotion and Dermalac cream. These fruit acids and milk-related products include glycolic and lactic acid lotions to improve skin's texture and appearance. Topical vitamin A prescription creams, such as Retin-A or Stieva-A, may be used if the redness is minimal.

In-office treatments, such as microdermabrasion, glycolic peels and Fraxel lasers, are options for evening out the bumps. "To treat the background redness," says Dr. Lupin, "IPL (intense pulsed light) phototherapy is usually the best option." Normally, a series of phototherapy sessions will reduce redness but won't completely eliminate it. Maintenance treatments may be required following the initial round.

"For proper guidance and optimal safety, review all treatment options with your physician," adds Dr. Lupin. "With care, gentle improvement should be possible." **e**

At-home help

Dr. Mark Lupin recommends trying the following sensitive skin cleansers and lotions to soften bumps and reduce redness.

NeoStrata 10% glycolic body lotion (\$33)

Reversa 10% glycolic body lotion (\$31)

Dove Sensitive Skin Lotion (\$7)

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