

# Sandpaper skin:

## The case of keratosis pilaris

By Arvin Ighani and Dr. Benjamin Barankin



### What is keratosis pilaris (KP)?

Does your skin have "goosebumps" that never seem to go away? Has your skin ever felt rough and bumpy like sandpaper? Do you have a child with this condition? Keratosis pilaris, colloquially known as "chicken skin," is a condition that results from a combination of dry skin and hair follicles plugged with keratin. Although it is harmless, it can be unsightly to some patients.

### What does keratosis pilaris look and feel like?

Keratosis pilaris presents as a collection of tiny papules (or bumps) on the skin that may look like



goosebumps or small pimples. If you run your hands over the bumps, the texture might be described as rough, like sandpaper.

The bumps can be pink, red or brown, and sometimes have an overlying slightly white-yellow scale. The colour of the bumps may vary based on your skin tone or the specific subtype of the condition. For instance, keratosis pilaris rubra presents with red-coloured bumps, while hyperpigmented keratosis pilaris shows as brown-coloured bumps.

Keratosis pilaris is typically found on the upper arms; less commonly it appears on the upper legs, forearms, buttocks or cheeks of the face, with a symmetrical distribution.

### What are the symptoms and natural course of KP?

Keratosis pilaris usually presents in childhood and typically improves as you grow into an adult, although it can start at any age. It is sometimes associated with eczema (or atopic dermatitis), given that both conditions are "dry" in nature. As such, keratosis pilaris can make the skin itchy,

although it is usually asymptomatic. Symptoms are sometimes associated with environmental factors such as the weather, with the dry winter months tending to bring out more prominent bumps.

### What causes keratosis pilaris?

The formation of bumps and scale in keratosis pilaris is closely tied to the hair follicles



in the skin and keratin. Hairs are anchored within the skin and run through follicles that open at the skin's surface. Keratin is a structural protein that is found in hair, skin and nails. It has

several functions, including strengthening the hair shaft and protecting certain skin cells from damage.

Sometimes, for unknown reasons, keratin will build up in a hair follicle and clog it. As you can imagine, the follicle gets plugged and the pressure causes the skin to form bumps, which give the condition its signature rough texture. There is probably a genetic component to the condition, as

Photo: Keratosis Pilaris Natural Treatment

children with keratosis pilaris tend to have parents with it.

### How can I manage my KP?

As a patient, or a parent of a child suffering from keratosis pilaris, the cosmetic appearance can be a nuisance. Although keratosis pilaris cannot be cured, management options do exist.

### Watchful waiting

For children, the disease tends to fade or resolve by adulthood, and you can wait for it to run its natural course.

### What you can do

- ✓ Avoid irritating the bumps on your skin. This means wearing loose-fitting clothing to reduce friction and trying not to scratch.
- ✓ Use lukewarm instead of hot water when taking a bath or showering, and consider changing to a non-soap body cleanser.
- ✓ Consider exfoliating the area of your body with keratosis pilaris to reduce clogging of the follicles.
- ✓ Hydrate your skin by using moisturizers (e.g., containing urea, lactic or glycolic acid) and by using a humidifier in your house during the dry winter months.



### Topical therapies

Creams containing urea, hydroxyl acid, salicylic acid, glycolic acid or lactic acid can be used to eradicate dead skin cells. Topical retinoids such as tretinoin or retinoic acid, which are derivatives of vitamin A, can help to reduce keratinization and promote the proliferation of new skin cells. Topical steroids are commonly used if the affected area is itchy or red.

As with all topical treatments, chemicals can irritate the skin and it is recommended that you consult your physician before starting these treatments, especially for children with sensitive skin.

### Ask for help

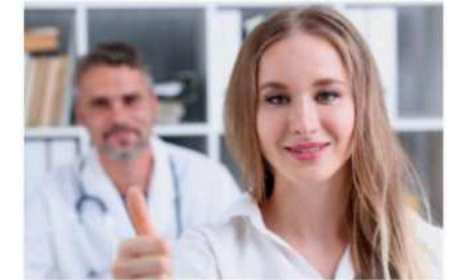
Whether you have a family member with keratosis pilaris or you suffer from the condition yourself, it tends to self-resolve by adulthood. However, if your condition leads to very dry skin, itchiness or unsightly red skin, follow the tips in this article to manage your symptoms. If you still find that you are not satisfied, consult your family physician or dermatologist to see what treatment options are best suited to your needs. 📺

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## Is Keratosis Pilaris Contagious?

Dermatologists regularly field tough questions from their patients but "is keratosis pilaris contagious?" isn't one of them.



There is no reason to be concerned. Keratosis pilaris is a genetic skin disorder and as such cannot be transmitted simply by coming into contact with someone who has it.

Based on how widespread keratosis pilaris is, it almost seems like it is contagious. Keratosis pilaris research shows the condition presenting itself in people from different racial backgrounds. Sufferers of

less severe cases of KP often become used to having the condition, particularly if other associated symptoms such as itchiness are absent. For most people the skin disorder improves or even disappears as one approaches the age of 30.

If you are not yet 30 and do not want to wait until it may resolve on its own, or if you still suffer from KP past the age of 30, there are many treatment options available to you. One of the best places to start is by altering your diet since the food you eat can have noticeable effects on your skin. So, in short, the answer is a definite "no" to the common "is keratosis pilaris contagious?" question.

Source: keratospilarisnaturaltreatment.org