

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

LIPOMA



WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THE LEAFLET?

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about lipomas. It tells you what the condition is, what causes it, what can be done about it and where information can be found.

WHAT IS A LIPOMA?

A lipoma is a non-cancerous (benign) lump which is made up of fat cells. They are usually located in the fatty layer under the skin. Rarely, they are in deeper muscles and organs. They can occur almost anywhere on the body but are most commonly found on the shoulders, arms, back, buttock and thigh.

Lipomas grow very slowly. They usually remain less than 10 cm across. People can develop more than one lipoma, and while they can affect people of all ages, they tend to appear during middle age.

They can be further categorised into subtypes according to their appearance under a microscope.

WHAT CAUSES LIPOMA?

The exact cause of lipomas is not well understood, most arise spontaneously without a clear cause. However, there are some risk factors that may increase the likelihood of developing lipomas, these include age, gender, hormone imbalances and trauma to the skin area.

ARE LIPOMAS HEREDITARY?

Some research suggests that if a family member has had lipomas, you may be at a higher risk of developing them too. Dercum disease is an example of this, as people with the condition develop lipomas.

Although it is not exactly known what causes it, it appears that genetics may be involved.

WHAT DOES LIPOMA LOOK AND FEEL LIKE?

You may notice a small, painless, rubbery textured lump beneath the skin that moves easily with slight finger pressure. Some people may find them uncomfortable and do not like the way they look.

Most are painless, but some may be painful if they press on nerves and other structures or if they contain many blood vessels. In some cases, lipomas may go unnoticed for years until they have grown in size.

HOW IS LIPOMA DIAGNOSED?

The diagnosis of a lipoma is made by examination by a healthcare professional. Sometimes ultrasound, CT or MRI scans might be needed to distinguish a lipoma from other benign skin lesions, including cysts, or cancer tumours. If the lump is increasing in size then further investigations such as a biopsy, or full excision might be organised. This is to rule out the very rare possibility it is a cancer such as liposarcoma.

If you notice that the lump develops any concerning symptoms such as fast growth, unable to be moved with finger pressure, bleeding, ulceration, significant pain or pain which is not solely pressure related, please seek the advice of a healthcare professional.

CAN LIPOMA BE TREATED OR CURED?

Lipomas are generally benign and there is no medical need to remove the vast



majority. They are often removed due to cosmetic reasons, but it is important to note that such procedures are not routinely offered on the NHS.

SELF CARE (WHAT CAN I DO?)

If you notice a new or a growing lump in your skin, you should consult your healthcare professional for further advice.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LIPOMA?

Web links to other relevant resources

<https://dermnetnz.org/topics/lipoma-and-liposarcoma>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lipoma/>

<https://patient.info/doctor/lipoma-pro>

Jargon

Buster: www.skinhealthinfo.org.uk/support-resources/jargon-buster/

Please note that the British Association of Dermatologists (BAD) provides web links to additional resources to help people access a range of information about their treatment or skin condition. The views expressed in these external resources may not be shared by the BAD or its members. The BAD has no control of and does not endorse the content of external links.

This leaflet aims to provide accurate information about the subject and is a consensus of the views held by representatives of the British Association of Dermatologists: individual patient circumstances may differ, which might alter both the advice and course of therapy given to you by your doctor.

This leaflet has been assessed for readability by the British Association of Dermatologists' Patient Information Lay Review Panel

BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF DERMATOLOGISTS

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PRODUCED | JUNE 2024

NEXT REVIEW DATE | JUNE 2027

