



Acanthosis Nigricans

Acanthosis Nigricans is a velvety brown thickening of the skin that occurs primarily on the neck, armpits, groin and knuckles. It is NOT dirt and it will NOT wash off. It is due to thickening of the surface of the skin. This thickening of the skin does not need to be locally treated unless you do not like the appearance of it. Topical treatment includes a variety of exfoliating creams such as lactic acid moisturizers (Lachydrin), alpha-hydroxy acid moisturizers and urea based creams (Carmol 20). Over the counter Amlactin (lactic acid) can also help. Additionally exercise and weight loss for those overweight can cure the thickened skin.

Acanthosis Nigricans most commonly occurs in people who are overweight. Control of weight through exercise and healthy eating can make the thickened skin go away and improve your present and future health. Obesity puts people at higher risk for high blood pressure, heart attacks and diabetes and can shorten an individual's life expectancy. In the past Acanthosis Nigricans has been felt to be marker for insulin resistance * (see explanation below) which in turn can put people at a higher risk of diabetes. However, recent research has found no increased risk of insulin resistance in Acanthosis patients that could not be directly linked to obesity alone. Thus obesity may well be independently causing the insulin resistance and the acanthosis. Since this issue is not completely worked out, we generally do blood work on people who have significant acanthosis. Since the treatment for both acanthosis nigricans and insulin resistance in the setting of obesity is weight loss, blood work may be postponed while the individual attempts to lose weight if the skin thickening is minimal or mild. The blood tests we do include a fasting glucose, insulin, cholesterol and triglyceride levels. For this fasting blood test, you should eat dinner but not a late snack and get this test done prior to breakfast.

* Diabetes is a lack of insulin which results in high sugars in the blood. It requires medications or injections of insulin to control. Insulin resistance, however, is when your insulin levels are very high. This problem can lead to additional weight gain and in turn even higher insulin levels. Insulin resistance is also a marker for the future risk of developing diabetes. If an overweight individual can control their insulin resistance through healthy eating habits and weight loss then they may well decrease their risk of developing diabetes.