

Acanthosis Nigricans



Paediatric & Neonatology Department

Acanthosis Nigricans

Acanthosis nigricans is a condition that causes areas of dark, thick velvety skin in body folds and creases. It typically affects the armpits, groin and neck. Less frequently, acanthosis nigricans appears in other skin sites or on mucosal surfaces.

Rarely, the skin condition can be a sign of cancer in an internal organ, such as the stomach or liver.

Clinical recognition of acanthosis nigricans is important because the disorder can occur in association with a variety of systemic abnormalities, many of which are characterized by insulin resistance. Obesity and diabetes mellitus are among the most frequently associated disorders. Rarely, acanthosis nigricans develops as a sign of internal malignancy.

Treating the cause of acanthosis nigricans might restore the usual color and texture of the skin.

Symptoms

The main sign of acanthosis nigricans is dark, thick, velvety skin in body folds and creases. It often appears in the armpits, groin and back of the neck. It develops slowly. The affected skin might be itchy, have an odor and develop skin tags.

When to see a doctor

Consult your health care provider if you notice changes in your skin — especially if the changes are sudden. You may have an underlying condition that needs treatment.



Causes

Acanthosis nigricans might be related to:

- Insulin resistance. Most people who have acanthosis nigricans have also become resistant to insulin. Insulin is a hormone secreted by the pancreas that allows the body to process sugar. Insulin resistance is what leads to type 2 diabetes. Insulin resistance is also related to polycystic ovarian syndrome and might be a factor in why acanthosis nigricans develops.
- Certain drugs and supplements. High-dose niacin, birth control pills, prednisone and other corticosteroids may cause acanthosis nigricans.
- Cancer. Some types of cancer cause acanthosis nigricans. These include lymphoma and cancers of the stomach, colon and liver.

Risk factors

The risk of acanthosis nigricans is higher in people who have obesity. The risk is also higher in people with a family history of the condition, especially in families where obesity and type 2 diabetes are also common.

Complications

People who have acanthosis nigricans are much more likely to develop type 2 diabetes.

Treatment

Since acanthosis nigricans is a benign, often asymptomatic disorder, cosmetic concerns are typically the primary indications for treatment. Treatment of the underlying cause, when feasible, is the preferred method of management, and obesity-related, drug-induced, and malignancy-associated acanthosis nigricans appear to frequently respond well to this intervention. In contrast, the likelihood for clinically significant improvement in acanthosis nigricans following the treatment of insulin resistant states is less certain.

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