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Angiokeratomas

What are angiokeratomas?

Angiokeratomas are small dark red to purple raised spots. They may also have a rough scaly surface. They are composed of surface blood vessels (dilated capillaries). Often unnoticed, they may become crusty and bleed if accidentally scratched or damaged, or a harmless clot may form in the lesion (thrombosis), changing the colour to dark purple or black overnight.

There are several types of angiokeratomas:

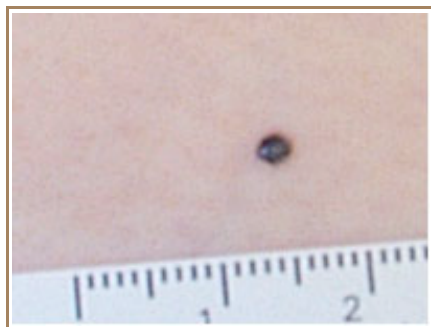
- Sporadic angiokeratoma
- Angiokeratoma of Fordyce
- Angiokeratoma circumscriptum
- Fabry syndrome (angiokeratoma corporis diffusum)

What causes angiokeratomas and who gets them?

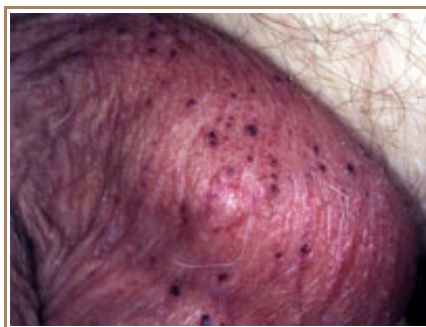
Apart from Fabry syndrome, which is caused by a genetic defect, the cause of other angiokeratomas is unknown.

Distinguishing features

Angiokeratomas



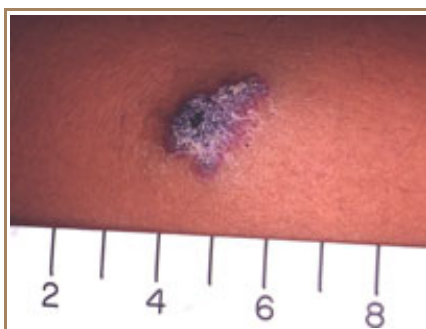
Sporadic angiokeratoma



Scrotal angiokeratomas (Fordyce)



Vulvar angiokeratomas (Fordyce)



Angiokeratoma circumscriptum

Type of angiokeratoma	Description
Sporadic angiokeratoma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solitary lesions • Common in those over 40 years
Angiokeratoma of Fordyce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most commonly found on the scrotum. Also found on the shaft of the penis, labia majora of the vulva, inner thigh and lower abdomen • Most prevalent in those over 40 years • Men are more often affected than women • May be a single lesion or multiple lesions (>100) • Lesions are small, red and less scaly in younger patients whilst in older patients they tend to be larger, blue/black and with overlying scales • Usually symptomless and may only be noticed when they bleed after scratching or intercourse
Angiokeratoma circumscriptum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rare "birthmark" (vascular malformation). May be present at birth but can occur later in childhood or adulthood • Females are more affected than men 3:1 • Cluster of lesions on a small area of the leg or trunk • Over time lesions may darken in colour and change shape and size
Fabry syndrome (angiokeratoma corporis diffusum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rare serious inherited disorder caused by a deficiency of an alpha-galactosidase enzyme, ceramide trihexosidase • Excessive quantities of glycosphingolipids are deposited in blood vessels and internal organs • More severe in males than females • Angiokeratomas are widespread, most numerous on lower trunk and groin area • May present with fever and painful hands & feet • May result in corneal opacities, kidney failure, heart failure, strokes, arthritis, colitis & many other problems.

What is the treatment for angiokeratomas?

Angiokeratomas are harmless surface vascular lesions that can usually be left alone. As the black spots sometimes resemble melanoma, a skin biopsy may be performed to rule out malignancy and allay any fears.

If bleeding becomes a concern or treatment is requested for cosmetic purposes, they can be removed. Surgical options include [excision](#), laser therapy, [cryotherapy](#) or [electrocautery](#).

Related information

References:

On DermNet NZ:

- [Vascular skin problems](#)
- [Capillary vascular malformation](#)
- [Genital skin problems](#)
- [Fordyce spots](#) – sebaceous hyperplasia of the lips

Other websites:

emedicine dermatology, the online textbook

- [Angiokeratoma Circumscriptum](#)
- [Angiokeratoma of the Scrotum](#)

Author: Vanessa Ngan, staff writer

DermNet does not provide an on-line consultation service.

If you have any concerns with your skin or its treatment, see a [dermatologist](#) for advice.

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