Acanthosis Nigricans, AN

Acanthosis nigricans is a disorder that may begin at any age including birth. It causes velvety, light brown-to-black markings. They are usually on the neck, under the arms, or in the groin. There are two forms of acanthosis nigricans. One is a *benign* (not harmful) form. It is most often associated with being overweight. Insulin resistance is the most common association of acanthosis nigricans in the younger age population. Most often AN is a benign condition. It causes no problems other than social because the AN appears as if a person has poor hygiene. AN is more common in people with darker skin pigmentation. Both sexes are affected equally. *Malignant* (harmful) AN occurs more often in elderly persons. However, cases have been reported in children with Wilms tumor.

Eating too much of the wrong foods, especially starches and sugars, raises insulin levels. Most patients with AN have a high insulin level. High levels of insulin may help cause acanthosis nigricans. Increased insulin activates insulin receptors in the skin and forces it to grow abnormally. Reducing the circulating insulin by a special diet can lead to a rapid improvement of the skin problem.

When AN develops in people who are not overweight, a medical work up is often done. Rarely AN is associated with a tumor. In these cases acanthosis can bee seen in extra places, such as the lips or hands, and is unusually severe. Sometimes AN is something you are born with or is due to an endocrine (glandular) disorder such as diabetes.

The malignant form of AN is associated with major problems because it is caused by a cancer. The tumor is often aggressive. Aggressive means forceful or destructive. The average survival time of patients with signs of malignant AN is 2 years. Longer survivals up to 12 years have been reported. Malignant AN occurs more often in elderly persons. However, cases have been reported in children with Wilms tumor. It affects all races the same.

TREATMENT

- Treatment to improve the appearance includes medications such as Retin-A, 20% urea, alpha hydroxyacids, and salicylic acid prescriptions. Your caregiver can help you with use of your medicine.
- If overweight, avoid starchy foods and sugars that raise the insulin level. Insulin is the hormone that controls your blood sugar.
- Medications are available to take by mouth that helps decrease high insulin.

PROGNOSIS

The benign form of AN has a good outcome. Patients with the benign form usually have few problems from their skin condition. It is easily treated with good results.

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