

Acanthosis Nigricans

Acanthosis Nigricans is a disorder that may begin at any age. It causes velvety, light-brown-to-black, markings usually on the neck, under the arms or in the groin. Acanthosis nigricans is most often associated with being overweight.

Eating too much of the wrong foods, especially starches and sugars, raises insulin levels. Most patients with acanthosis nigricans have a high insulin level, higher than those of the same weight who don't have acanthosis nigricans. Elevated levels of insulin in most cases probably cause acanthosis nigricans. This happens when there is insulin "spillover" into the skin. This 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 acanthosis nigricans develops in people who are not overweight, a medical work-up should be done. Rarely acanthosis nigricans is associated with a tumor. In these cases acanthosis can be seen in extra places, such as the lips or hands and is unusually severe. Sometimes acanthosis nigricans is congenital or due to an endocrine (glandular) disorder.

Treatment to just improve the appearance includes Retin-A, 20% urea, alpha hydroxyacids, and salicylic acid prescriptions.