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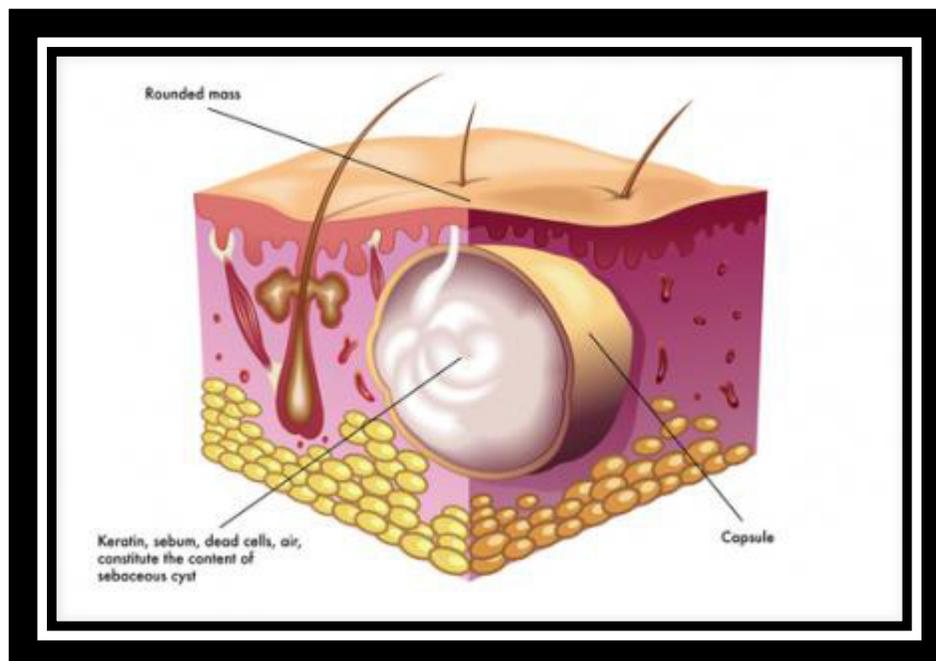
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EPIDERMOID CYSTS

As human we shed our skin. This is what people call dandruff. An epidermoid cyst (or sebaceous cyst) is filled with dead skin. These are the most common skin cysts.

When a hair follicle is blocked or an epidermoid cell [skin producing cell] is buried. The epidermoid cell produces dead skin that builds up and has nowhere to go. Epidermoid cysts are benign lesions (they are not a cancer).

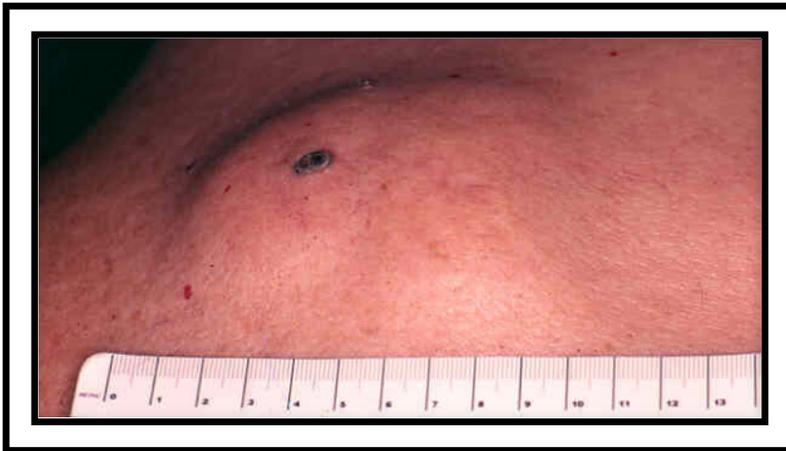
Figure 1. Diagram of an epidermoid cyst



Epidermoid cysts are flesh-colored to a yellowish colour, firm, and round. They are of variable size. A central pore may be present.

They are usually asymptomatic. They can drain releasing the dead skin which resembles cottage cheese and may have a foul odor. They may become infected. If this occurs they should be drained and you may be started on antibiotics.

Figure 2. Photo of an epidermoid cyst



If the area starts to bleed or change significantly it must be re-evaluated. A skin cancer can develop near or at the same site.

Surgery can permanently remove an epidermoid cyst. The entire cyst must be removed. Previous infection leading to scarring and tethering of the cyst to the surrounding tissues may increase the risk of recurrence after surgery. If there is a predisposition to cyst formation, further cysts may develop in the same general area.

Sebaceous cysts are very common and generally do not require medical treatment. The British Columbia Medical Services Plan (MSP) has elected not to cover the costs of epidermoid cyst removal. The cost of cyst removal is \$400.00 plus tax.

Risks of surgical removal include pain, infection (1-5%), a small amount of bleeding, and a surgical scar. The scar is initially raised and red. Over time the scar will flatten and fade. It may take 9 – 24 months for your scar to look its best.

The surgical procedure for cyst removal involves numbing the area around the cyst with a local anesthetic. A scalpel is used to remove the lesion. The cyst is sent to a hospital laboratory for analysis by a pathologist. Stitches are removed at 5 to 10 days. To avoid infection, antibiotics and wound care are used after surgery.

Figure 3. Diagram showing the principles of cyst removal

