

POIKILODERMA OF CIVATTE (SOLAR ELASTOSIS)

Poikiloderma of Civatte is a fancy term for a skin condition. It normally produces a red to brown discoloration on the sides of the neck. The term “poikiloderma” refers to a change in the skin where there is thinning, increased pigmentation and dilation of the fine blood vessels in the area. A Dr. Civatte first described the condition in the 1920’s. In most cases, the condition is of cosmetic concern only.

Poikiloderma occurs most commonly in fair skinned people and more commonly in women than in men. People usually complain of chronic reddish to brown discoloration on the sides of the neck and upper chest. There are usually no symptoms but occasionally some patients report mild burning, itching or an increased sensation in the skin. The areas appear to run in a line with the normal creases of the skin on the neck. The area under the chin is usually not involved.

The cause of poikiloderma is related to chronic sun exposure. This is not recent sun exposure but exposure when you were a child. Over time the slight damage builds up to produce the discoloration that is present today. There may be a genetic tendency to develop this problem but this may be related to fair skin.

There are some topical medications which can help this condition although the response is very slow. Sun protection is of utmost importance. It would be best to use a sunscreen with a physical block agent such as zinc oxide or titanium dioxide with at least an SPF of 30. Some topical products containing alpha hydroxy acids or tretinoin (Retin-A) may also be used.

If there are any other questions regarding this condition, please do not hesitate to ask me before you leave the office.

