SOLAR LENTIGO/LENTIGINES (LIVER SPOTS)

Solar lentigines are benign growths. They appear as flat, brown, freckle-like areas. Most commonly they occur on the face, neck, the outer aspects of the arms, and the backs of the hands. They are related to low grade cumulative sun exposure usually in your younger years.

Some people refer to solar lentigines as liver spots. These growths have nothing to do with any liver problem or any other internal illness. They are totally benign. They indicate previous sun damage in the skin and not old age.

Solar lentigines are slightly different from true freckles because freckles go away in the winter and reappear in the summer. The sun-induced lentigines are present year round. They can slowly darken with time. It is important to use a moisturizer with a sunscreen on a regular basis to prevent darkening of these lesions and to prevent new ones from forming.

In general, solar lentigines do not need any treatment. In fact, it can be quite difficult to remove large numbers of these lesions. Treatments such as laser or peeling procedures done by a cosmetic dermatologist may be required. There are topical treatments which can help lighten these discolored spots. These creams are vitamin A derivatives, such as over the counter retinol products, prescription tretinoin (Retin A) type products or prescription bleaching creams.

Occasionally, individual lesions would require testing or treatments such as liquid nitrogen freezing.

In general, these sun-induced growths are totally harmless. They can be a problem because of their appearance. They are not precancerous. If any individual growth would seem to change in terms of rapid growth, bleeding, or crusting, please point this out to me.

If you have any other questions regarding these growths, please do not hesitate to ask me after you read this.