

Sebaceous Cysts:

The term sebaceous cyst is a misnomer as these conditions do not arise from the sebaceous glands and are not composed of sebaceous material. The cyst forms as a result of hair follicle blockage.

Sebaceous cysts are specifically defined pathologically but this is of little relevance clinically.

Sebaceous cysts are subcutaneous swellings, either single or multiple and are usually attached to the skin. These are common and can occur almost anywhere in the skin. Many people ignore them despite their appearance and occasional odour.

They can however, become inflamed or infected. Antibiotics are then commonly used with some success. However, the infection is a result of a mechanical problem associated with either the rupture or leakage of pultaceous material through the cyst wall. The antibiotics are not always effective, but should be commenced.

One simple method of treating the infected cyst is to drain it under local anaesthetic and use an antibiotic cover. Inflammation will settle and definitive surgical excision can be undertaken at a later date, when the chance of post-operative complications such as bleeding and spreading infection, are less likely. The post-operative care is also more simply managed.

In some cases, surgical excision of infected sebaceous cysts is the most practical solution. One method is demonstrated in the surgical excision of an inflamed cyst.

Surgery on inflamed tissues is more hazardous - complete primary closure is not usually advisable. A technique of packing is shown which reduces the bleeding, dead space and prevents hematoma and abscess formation.

As well as the typical sebaceous cyst which has a punctum and can discharge, there is the implantation epidermoid cyst, which commonly occurs on the fingers. It appears to have the same structure as the sebaceous cyst but usually does not have a visible punctum.

The term 'pilar cyst' is used to denote development from a hair follicle. This cyst is common on the scalp or scrotum.

Sebaceous cysts are simple conditions which can usually be readily treated by a variety of surgical techniques.