



CHONDRODERMATITIS NODULARIS HELICIS (CNH)

Kathleen W. Judge, M.D.

Medical Director

*Diplomate American Board of Dermatology
Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery*

Chondrodermatitis Nodularis Helicis (CNH) is an inflammatory condition that affects the skin and underlying cartilage in the rim of the ear. Chronic sun damage along with pressure, usually from sleeping on that side, causes inflammation of the skin and cartilage on the outer or inner rim of the ear.

CNH in the earliest stage may simply appear as a tender, red, small scaly area. Later stages of CNH appear as tender, red, crusty or warty papules, small punched out ulcers or even deep ulcerations extending to the cartilage - essentially a pressure sore on the ear. CNH may be mistaken for skin cancer, but skin cancers are not typically tender or painful.

As with any pressure sore, the principal treatment for CNH is avoidance of pressure on the involved area. As long as there is pressure on the area, it will be very difficult to get it to heal. Topical anti-inflammatory medications, such as corticosteroids and tacrolimus, may improve CNH by reducing the inflammation and the tenderness. Rarely, cryotherapy or surgical treatment is required to remove all of the damaged area to encourage healing, but it may take weeks to months for the treated area to heal after these procedures. Also, CNH commonly recurs even after surgical treatment due to the continuation of pressure caused by the patient's sleeping position. To help with this problem, there are special CNH pillows designed to eliminate the fundamental cause of the problem by removing the pressure from the external ear.