

Getting older: The skin tag that wasn't

We old guys got problems. I got issues I didn't even know could be issues.

Body parts I wasn't even aware of start to ache. Memory fades. Getting a haircut involves the ears as much as the rest of my head. My butt is wrinkling up.

And we geezers get stupid things growing on us, like skin tags. You know, those little, floppy pieces of skin that show up under the armpits, on the neck and elsewhere. They serve no purpose except to make us uglier and cause pain if rubbed the wrong way.

I had a couple that got really irritated and were very sensitive and painful until they wore off on their own. I saw the doctor, thinking the worst. But he only chuckled and offered to remove them surgically if they really bothered me.

They didn't bother me *that* much. But other things can disguise themselves with similar symptoms and appearance. They hide well, especially when you have to awkwardly twist your back just to see them in the mirror.

This is the story of a skin tag that wasn't.

The damn thing hurt like heck, tucked in on the inside of my left shoulder. Colored like my skin, it flopped around like one of those tags when I touched it. I figured it was just one more sign that I'm past my prime.

After two weeks, it hurt like hell. It got so I couldn't even sleep on that side, and that's where I sleep most of the time.



Reporter's

NOTEBOOK

BY KEN LEVY

After two weeks, it hurt like hell. It got so I couldn't even sleep on that side, and that's where I sleep most of the time.

But I let it be. One morning I did my acrobatic twist in front of the mirror to get a better gander at it. It seemed, unaccountably, to have grown.

But, stubborn as the proverbial old mule, I was determined to wait it out. I refused to go to the doctor. The thing would work itself off and I'd be fine.

Another week, and the pain redoubled. I couldn't sleep.

I took another peek in the mirror and, to my alarm, discovered a circular, red, blotchy, bumpy circle around the "tag." A two-inch-long line ran out the bottom of the circle, like a little kid's drawing of a lollipop.

Scared again of what this evil might portend, I gave in reluctantly and went to the clinic. But no emergency room this time. Just a friendly visit to my doctor.

The nurse who prepped me asked me to take off my shirt, after assuring me my vitals were acceptable. She looked at my back. She looked at me with a frowning, quizzical expression, then looked at my back and gave me that look again. She did this like three times, back and forth. Then she hurriedly left the room, not saying a word.

Fear set in.

My doctor came in, a grave but

friendly smile on his face, and examined my back. He, too, gave me a peculiar look, and said he'd be "right back."

OK, now I'm really scared.

He was gone quite awhile. Was he seeking a second opinion? Another doctor? A specialist in deadly diseases who would pronounce my doom?

No. He came back with a small covered container of what I assumed was alcohol, a pair of tweezers, a magnifying glass, some gauze and a grim look on his face.

"Hold still," he said.

I felt him grasp the tag and slowly, slowly pull and pull some more. It stung, but not unbearably so, and finally he had it in his tweezers.

He showed it to me before dropping it into the clear container. It was a tick.

The evil-looking thing was a quarter-inch long and fairly thick. I thought ticks were tiny, almost invisible.

Then it hit me. A few weeks ago, it might have been.

The little bloodsucker had been feeding on me for weeks, bloating its filthy little body as it burrowed into my skin. Showering hadn't removed him, since I had treated the area gingerly due to the pain.

Doc reassured me the little bugger wasn't a Lyme disease carrier, and I've had no symptoms from being lunch. But being food is not my first choice in life.

In fact, it ticks me off.