Is your man turning into a lizard?

Mary Killen is famous for her matchmaking skills, but older men who ignore unsightly bumps and blemishes are making her task harder. Take better care of your skin, chaps, she says. Here's how...

In my capacity as self-elected matchmaker, I am always on the lookout for single older men. Functioning examples are, of course, a rarity. They are usually snapped up as soon as they come on the market. I was therefore delighted to be introduced at a business lunch to Iain, a prime specimen with all faculties intact: top job, 50something, cosy and engaging.

Yet in the centre of Iain's forehead resided a raised colourless blob about the size of a broad bean. This threw me as I had to put all my mental energy into not letting my gaze wander towards it. What on earth was such a sophisticated man doing in not having this blob attended to? To me, it spoke of Iain's lack of aesthetic judgment and therefore he disqualified himself from my matchmaking books.

Facial 'blobs' present a defining difference between men and women. Correction, between older men and women. Today's younger men are just as vain as women. A woman of any age confronted in her magnifying mirror by a new facial blemish – be it broken veins or a prominent mole with hairs growing out of it – will deal with it pronto. And not just for reasons of vanity, but to check there is nothing malign there. An older man seems almost oblivious to their existence.

Even men with nagging wives prefer to do nothing. Stripped off for the beach in Dorset last summer, Nicholas, a friend's attractive (in clothes) 65-year-old husband, had what looked to me like rows of Rice Krispies around his armpits. Why would a woman want intimate contact with these? I saw his wife's frustration when the Krispies were unveiled. 'He says they're harmless and I should stop being so neurotic,' she said.

And then there's Philip, the Lake District farmer – in youth famously dashing; with age the weather-beating has done its worst, and a network of blue and red broken veins across his cheeks disfigure him. A woman would conceal them before seeing a dermatologist. Yet Philip seems proud of them. 'They're getting worse,' said his wife. 'To me it's as if someone's thrown a can of paint over that handsome face, but he says they're just par for the course when you work outside all day. I think he sees them as a badge of honour.'

My own husband has a number of defects, but none of them are facial or skin related. However, I know for a fact that I would have difficulty getting him to a doctor were he suddenly to grow a blob on his forehead.

Yet when men eventually do consult a dermatologist – usually because the blob is starting to change shape and cancer needs to be ruled out – they often admit they have been suffering low-grade worry about it for years and wish they had sought advice earlier. The relief of knowing it's benign is immense.

Warning: these things that suddenly appear on our faces may not be benign, particularly if they are growing rapidly. To find out more about those harmless but visually problematic looks-spoilers that men like to ignore, I consulted the distinguished plastic surgeon Matthew Potter, a specialist in head and neck skin cancer. He talked me through the everyday non-malignant conditions he also treats...

CAMPBELL DE MORGAN SPOTS These are often scattered like confetti around the upper body. They are red, blue or purple, 2mm to 3mm in size and benign. They can be shaved off by a GP or dermatologist. The bleeding is stopped by cautery (using an electronic gun).



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SKIN TAGS Often chafing-related and looking a bit like a Rice Krispie on a stalk, these appear mostly in armpits and the groin but sometimes on the neck or jawline. After a local anaesthetic, a GP or dermatologist slices through the base.

LENTIGOS Also called age spots, these appear after a certain age, particularly if we don't use SPF. A light sprinkling of freckles is one thing but when one of these grows noticeably large, it can be 'blasted' with liquid nitrogen by a dermatologist – and bear in mind that melanomas can grow from inside a freckle.

CYSTS Particularly noticeable on a balding head, they appear anywhere where there are hair follicles. 'We remove the hair follicle, the sac and its contents,' says Mr Potter. 'Never squeeze a cyst as it can become infected.'

THREAD VEINS 'Also known as spider naevi, these are often linked to an outdoor life, sun exposure and alcohol,' says Mr Potter. 'But also genetics.' Laser treatment halts the flow of the blood.

Many GP surgeries have a specialist in skin treatment, otherwise you can be referred to a dermatologist via the NHS or privately. 'Our main concern as skin doctors is in detecting melanomas and non-melanoma skin cancers,' says Mr Potter. 'If something has appeared, is growing fast and hasn't stopped changing within six weeks, get it checked out.'

Go, men, go. It'll raise household morale, too.

For a consultation with Mr Potter, go to matthew-potter.com