

Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. It is normal for your body to replace old cells with new ones. Sometimes skin cells keep dividing when new cells are not needed and skin cancer occurs.

Risk Factors

Anyone, including people with dark skin, hair and eyes, can develop skin cancer, not just those at higher risk. You are at higher risk if you have:

- Spent a lot of time in the sun
- Family members with skin cancer
- Certain types or a large number of moles
- Skin that burns or freckles in the sun
- Light-colored skin, hair and eyes

Prevention

- Avoid being in the sun from 10 AM to 4 PM.
- Wear clothing such as a hat, long sleeves and pants to block the sun's rays.
- Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher year round when you are going outside.
- Learn to know what skin cancer looks like.
- Check your skin monthly. Report any changes to your doctor.
- If you are at risk, see a doctor who specializes in the skin called a dermatologist each year for a skin exam.

There are 3 major types of skin cancer:

- **Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC):** This is the most common. This cancer grows in the basal cells in the lowest layer of the skin. This type grows slowly and rarely spreads to other parts of the body, but early treatment is needed. This type appears on skin exposed to the sun such as the face, ears, scalp, and upper body. Look for:
 - Shiny or pearly bumps or growths
 - A sore that heals and then re-opens
 - A pink, slightly raised growth
 - Red, irritated patches of skin
 - A waxy scar

- **Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC):** This cancer grows in the squamous cells in the upper layer of the skin. This type can be found anywhere including the inside of the mouth and the genital area. Get early treatment to prevent the spread of this cancer. Look for a crusty or scaly patch of skin often with a red base.
- **Melanoma:** This type begins in the skin cells that give skin its color. Melanoma can spread quickly to other tissues and organs. The cure rate is high with early treatment. Look for changes in moles or new moles where:
 - One half of the mole does not match the other half.
 - The edges of the mole are uneven or ragged.
 - The color is uneven with more than one shade or color present.
 - The size is larger than a pencil eraser or there is any change in size.
 - There are changes in the way it feels. It may itch, feel dry, lumpy, swollen or tender.

Your Care

Treatment involves removing the tissue suspected of being skin cancer from the skin. This is done in the doctor's office or in the hospital. The tissue is sent to a lab to check for cancer cells. This is called a biopsy. Often, no further treatment is needed. Skin cancer may also be treated with radiation therapy and chemotherapy.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.