

Skin Cancer

What are the skin cancer facts?

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. More than 1 million cases are diagnosed each year and according to current estimates, 40 to 50 percent of Americans who live to age 65 will have skin cancer at least once. Learning the characteristics of the most common types of skin cancer is essential to staying healthy. Early detection and diagnosis is key.

What are the types of skin cancer?

Actinic Keratosis

Actinic keratosis, or solar keratosis, is a precancerous condition that has the potential for developing into squamous cell carcinoma. It appears as rough, red or brown, scaly patches on the skin. They are often more easily felt than seen. Like skin cancer, it is usually found on sun-exposed areas of the body, but it can be found on other parts of the body as well.



Actinic Keratosis

Basal Cell Carcinoma

Basal cell carcinoma accounts for more than 90 percent of all skin cancers. It appears as a small, pink bump or patch on the head or neck, although it may be found on any part of the body. If untreated, it will ulcerate, bleed, or crust over. Basal cell cancer is slow growing and does not usually spread to other parts of the body. However, if left untreated, it can spread to nearby areas and invade bone and other tissues under the skin. A person who develops basal cell cancer is at risk of developing the cancer again, in the same place, or developing a new basal cell cancer somewhere else.



Basal Cell Carcinoma

Squamous Cell Carcinoma

Squamous cell carcinoma can look like basal cell cancers, but it is usually more scaly and rough. This type of cancer is often found on the head and neck, but it has a tendency to grow on the ears, lips, and the backs of arms and hands. It can also develop in other skin areas like scars or ulcers. Squamous cell carcinoma may be more aggressive than basal cell carcinoma and is also more likely to grow deep below the skin and spread to distant parts of the body. If treated early, however, this type of cancer is potentially curable. Squamous cell carcinoma is the most common skin cancer in organ transplant recipients.



Squamous Cell Carcinoma

Malignant Melanoma

Malignant melanoma is less common than basal or squamous cell carcinoma, but it is more dangerous. It usually appears as an irregular brown, black and/or red spot or changing mole. Among white men, melanoma appears most frequently on the trunk; among white women, on the lower leg. Among blacks, although melanoma is rare, it appears most frequently on the palms, the soles of the feet, and the skin under nails. If caught early, melanoma is potentially curable.



Malignant Melanoma

What are the risk factors?

- You may be at increased risk for developing skin cancer if you have been exposed to excessive amounts of unprotected natural sunlight (i.e., construction workers, farmers, sunbathers, and those who are active in outdoor sports) and artificial sunlight (i.e., tanning beds, sun lamps). Most skin cancers appear after age 50, but the sun's damaging effects begin at an early age (e.g., severe sunburns before the age of 18).
- Have fair skin, blue, green or hazel eyes, red or blond hair, and/or extensive freckling
- Have multiple or unusual looking moles (e.g., dysplastic nevi). **Dysplastic nevi** are moles whose appearance is different from that of common moles. They are generally larger than ordinary moles and have irregular and indistinct borders. Frequently, their color is not uniform and ranges from pink to dark brown; they are usually flat, but parts may be raised above the skin surface. Doctors believe that dysplastic nevi are more likely than ordinary moles to develop into melanoma.
- Have a family or personal history of skin cancer
- Have been immunosuppressed especially after an organ transplant
- Work with coal tar, arsenic compounds, creosote, pitch or paraffin oil
- Have traumatized skin sites such as major scars or burn areas
- Have been exposed to excessive amounts of radium or x-rays
- Live in sunny climates and/or mountainous areas

How can skin cancer be prevented?

There are several ways to prevent skin cancer. These include:

- Stay indoors or avoid unnecessary sun exposure, especially between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun's rays are the strongest. When you are outside, remember that the shorter your shadow, the more damaging the sun's rays.
- Use sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30 or higher, depending on your skin type, as well as one that protects against UVA and UVB rays.
- Apply a sunscreen as part of your daily routine. Do so generously for maximum protection, especially on body parts easily overlooked (i.e., lips, tops of ears, head, back of neck and hands, and feet). For more information, ask your health care provider for a copy of the "Sunscreens and Sun Protection: Instructions for Cancer Prevention Center Patients" information sheet.

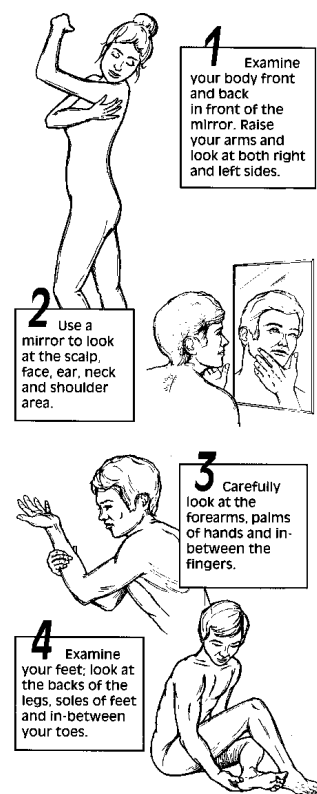
- Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going into the sun.
 - **Sweat Resistant:** If perspiring, you will be protected up to 30 minutes; re-apply after 30 minutes.
 - **Water-resistant:** During continuous water exposure, you will be protected up to 40 minutes; re-apply after 40 minutes.
 - **Waterproof:** Protects twice as long as water resistant products (up to 80 minutes); re-apply after 80 minutes.
- Wear protective clothing (e.g., wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved shirt and pants, sunglasses with UV protection).
- Avoid reflective surfaces such as water, sand, snow, and concrete. Stay in the shade.
- Beware of cloudy days. You can still get burned.
- Don't use sunlamps or tanning beds.

Why is early detection and treatment of skin cancer so important?

The cure rate for skin cancer is high when brought to a doctor's attention before it has had a chance to spread. Therefore, the following protective measures are recommended for maintaining healthy skin.

Skin Examinations

- Know your **ABCDE**F's of moles.
 - **Asymmetry:** Does half of the mole (or other pigmented skin spot) look different from the other half?
 - **Border:** Is the border of the mole irregular or ill defined?
 - **Color:** Is the color uneven (shades of one or more colors), or has it changed over time?
 - **Diameter:** Is the mole larger than a pencil eraser?
 - **Elevation:** Has the surface of the mole changed? If it was smooth and flat before, is it now elevated (raised)?
 - **Feeling:** Has the sensation (feeling) around the mole changed? Does it itch? Is it painful?
- Do a complete skin exam every month in front of a mirror, in privacy, and fully undressed (such as before or after a bath) in bright, natural sunlight or a good light.
 - Start with your head, scalp and face, and continue in an orderly fashion down the entire length of your body, both front and back. It is important to look for any new growths or changes including pink patches or spots, scaly growths, bleeding areas, or changing moles. A friend can help you examine your back and scalp.
 - Bend your elbows and look carefully at your palms; forearms, including the undersides; and the upper arms.



Skin Exam

- Examine the back and front of your legs. Also look between your buttocks and around your genital area.
- Sit and closely examine your feet, including the soles and the spaces between the toes.
- Get a full-skin examination by your doctor every year. Your physician should do so during your annual exam. A dermatologist, a doctor who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of skin diseases, can perform this exam as well.
- If you **already have had** skin cancers:
 - Feel both sides of your neck, armpits, and groin crease for any new lumps or bumps that may be enlarged lymph nodes.
 - Schedule a skin examination more frequently than once a year. Dermatologists and Dermatologic Surgeons, who are skin cancer specialists, can often diagnose and treat many skin cancers at an early stage. Ask your doctor how often you should have these skin examinations.

Are there other resources that can help me learn more about skin cancer?

For more information about M. D. Anderson Cancer Center and skin cancer treatment, you can call *askMDAnderson* toll-free at 877-MDA-6789. Our website is <http://www.mdanderson.org/>.

For more information about skin cancer, you may call the National Cancer Institute's (NCI's) Cancer Information Service toll-free at 800-422-6237, Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. A trained Cancer Information Specialist is available to answer your questions in both English and Spanish. Their web site is <http://www.cancer.gov/cancerinformation>.

You can also call the American Cancer Society toll-free at 800-227-2345 or the number listed under "American Cancer Society" in the white pages of the telephone book. Their website is <http://www.cancer.org/>.