



Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. According to current estimates, 40 to 50 percent of Americans who live to age 65 will have skin cancer at least once. Although anyone can get skin cancer, the risk is greatest for people who have fair skin that freckles easily.

UV radiation from the sun is the main cause of skin cancer. In addition, artificial sources of UV radiation — such as sunlamps and tanning booths — can cause skin cancer. People who live in areas of the U.S. that get high levels of UV radiation from the sun are more likely to get skin cancer. For example, skin cancer is more common in Texas and Florida than in Minnesota, where the sun is not as strong.

There are three common types of skin cancers.

- **Basal cell carcinomas** are the most common, accounting for more than 90 percent of all skin cancers in the United States. They are slow-growing cancers that seldom spread to other parts of the body.
- **Squamous cell carcinomas** also rarely spread, but they do so more often than basal cell carcinomas.
- **Melanoma** is the most dangerous of all cancers that occur in the skin. Melanoma can spread to other organs, and when it does, it is often fatal.

Both basal and squamous cell cancers are found mainly on areas of the skin exposed to the sun — the head, face, neck, hands, and arms. However, skin cancer can occur anywhere. Changes in the skin are not sure signs of cancer; however, it's important to see a doctor if any symptom lasts longer than 2 weeks. Don't wait for the area to hurt — skin cancers seldom cause pain.

All skin cancers could be cured if they were discovered and brought to a doctor's attention before they had a chance to spread. Therefore, you should check your skin regularly. The most common warning sign of skin cancer is a change on the skin, especially a new growth or a sore that doesn't heal. Skin cancers don't all look the same. For example, skin cancer can start as a small, smooth, shiny, pale, or waxy lump. Or it can appear as a firm red lump. Sometimes, the lump bleeds or develops a crust. Skin cancer also can start as a flat, red spot that is rough, dry, or scaly.

In treating skin cancer, the doctor's main goal is to remove or destroy cancer completely, leaving as small a scar as possible. To plan the best treatment for each person, the doctor considers the type of skin cancer, its location and size,

and the person's general health and medical history. Treatment for skin cancer may involve some type of surgery but there are many non-surgical modalities that are equally effective, and not nearly as invasive. These include topical chemotherapy medications, electrocautery, cryotherapy, laser surgery, and others. In some cases, radiation therapy or chemotherapy (anticancer drugs) or a combination of these treatments may be necessary for appropriate treatment.

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