

Skin Cancer

The two most common types of skin cancer are basal cell and squamous cell, usually referred to as non-melanoma skin cancers. Basal cell accounts for more than 90 percent of all skin cancers in the United States. It is a slow-growing cancer that seldom spreads to other parts of the body. Squamous cell is much less common than basal cell and is more likely to spread to other parts of the body.

A third type of skin cancer, melanoma, is the most serious of all skin cancer types because it is more likely than non-melanoma skin cancers to invade healthy tissues and spread to other parts of the body. Melanomas usually occur on or around existing moles.

The best defense against any type of skin cancer is finding and treating it early. When squamous or basal cell skin cancers are found early, there is nearly a 100 percent chance for cure while for melanoma, there is nearly a 97 percent chance.

Symptoms

Symptoms of skin cancer vary from person to person and may include a:

- change on the skin, such as a new spot or one that changes in size, shape or color
- sore that doesn't heal
- spot or sore that changes in sensation, itchiness, tenderness or pain
- small, smooth, shiny, pale or waxy lump
- firm red lump that may bleed or develops a crust
- flat, red spot that is rough, dry or scaly

Many of these symptoms are not cancer, but if you notice one or more of them for more than two weeks, see your doctor.

Risk Factors

Many factors may influence the development of skin cancer, including:

- **age** Forty to 50 percent of Americans who live to age 65 will develop skin cancer at least once.
- **appearance** People who have red or blond hair, fair skin, freckles and blue or light-colored eyes are more at risk of developing skin cancer. Skin cancer occurs less often in Hispanics, Asians and African Americans. However, darker-skinned people and those who tan easily can still develop skin cancer, as well as suffer long-term effects, like dry skin and premature aging.
- **climate/geography** People who live in sunny climates or in southern states are at an increased risk for skin cancer.
- **personal/family history** A history of skin cancer, especially melanoma, can put people at higher risk.
- **employment** Working around coal, tar, arsenic compounds, creosote, pitch and paraffin oil puts people at higher risk.
- **previous injuries** If someone has traumatized skin such as a major scar or burn, that person could be at higher risk.



Felicia Gardner describes herself as your typical California beach bunny. After learning she had melanoma six years ago when she was pregnant with her first child, she became an authority on protecting her family from excessive sun exposure. She still enjoys swimming, water skiing, boating and biking, but now always applies sunscreen.

Facts About Sunscreen

SPF (Sun Protection Factor) indicates the amount of time you can spend in the sun without burning. A sunscreen with an SPF 30 or higher is a good choice for most everyone. Apply it 30 minutes before going outside, spreading it evenly over all exposed parts of your body. Follow product directions for reapplication.

Screening

Look for changes as well as new growths. Learn the ABC's of melanoma:

- **Asymmetry** of lesion: Are both sides of the lesion different?
- **Border** irregularity: Are the edges notched as opposed to smooth?
- **Color** variegation: Is the lesion a mixture of black, blue, red and white?
- **Diameter**: Is the diameter greater than six millimeters? (Most melanomas are larger than the head of a pencil.)
- **Evolution**: Is the lesion growing in width or height?
- **Feeling**: Has the sensation around a mole or spot changed?

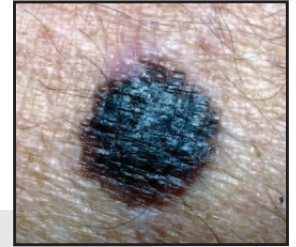
These recommendations serve as a guide. Promptly show your doctor any suspicious skin area, non-healing sore or change in a mole or freckle. If exam results suggest cancer, more extensive diagnostic tests should be conducted.

Reducing Your Risk

You can take action to reduce your risks of developing skin cancer. Making the healthy changes below does not mean you will not get skin cancer, but it may lower your chances.

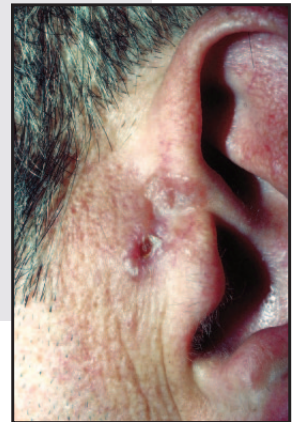
- **use sunscreen.** Choose SPF 30 or higher, put it on 30 minutes before going outside, and follow product directions for reapplication.
- **find shade.** Look for shady areas under an umbrella or tarp. Better yet, stay indoors between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- **cover up.** Wear dark, tightly woven clothing to protect your skin from the sun.
- **wear a hat.** Pick one with a large brim to protect the ears and neck.
- **put on sunglasses.** Buy inexpensive sunglasses to protect your eyes from harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays.
- **protect your children.** Babies under six months of age should be completely shielded from direct sun exposure. Apply sunscreen to infants over six months of age, and teach older children to make applying sunscreen a regular habit before they go out to play.
- **avoid the use of tanning beds or other artificial sunlight sources.** Tanning beds are not safe alternatives to the sun.

Take the time to discuss your own risks with your health care provider who can best advise you on risk-reduction strategies that are right for you.



Melanoma

It is important to recognize suspicious moles or spots and have them evaluated by a doctor. These are examples of different skin cancers.



Squamous Skin Cancer



Basal Skin Cancer

MD Anderson Resources

The Cancer Prevention Center can help you understand your risk of developing cancer through risk assessment and, when appropriate, genetic testing. The center offers personalized risk-reduction strategies, including healthy lifestyle recommendations and the use of medications to reduce cancer risk. Specialists perform risk-based cancer screening exams based on age, gender and cancer risk factors.

MD Anderson provides cancer care services at five convenient locations in the greater Houston area: Bay Area, Katy, Texas Medical Center, Sugar Land and The Woodlands.

For more information about MD Anderson programs or services, or to make an appointment, contact askMDAnderson at 1-877-632-6789 and ask for Carla, or visit www.mdanderson.org/ask.

Want to learn how you can prevent cancer?

Get a personalized action plan by completing MD Anderson's Cancer Risk Check at www.mdanderson.org/riskcheck.

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