



Ask The Expert

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Topic

Skin Cancer

What is it?

Lengthened exposure to UV rays that can come from natural or artificial sources can cause most skin cancers. Skin cancer is the out-of-control growth of abnormal cells in the epidermis (the outermost skin layer) that triggers mutations. These mutations lead the skin cells to multiply rapidly and form malignant tumors. The main types of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma.

Basal Cell Carcinoma

Basal Cell Carcinoma begins in the basal cells (a type of cell within the skin that produces new skin cells as old ones die). It often appears as a slightly transparent bump on the skin. Other symptoms include a growth or sore that won't heal, a brown, black or blue lesion, a flat scaly patch or waxy-scar like lesion.

Squamous Cell Carcinoma

Squamous Cell Carcinoma of the skin is a type of cancer that starts as a growth of cells on the skin. Though not typically life-threatening, if untreated it can spread and cause serious complications. Symptoms include a firm bump on the skin, a flat sore, a rough scaly patch on the lip etc.

Melanoma

Melanoma is typically the most dangerous form of skin cancer but can be treated successfully if found early. Symptoms include a change in an existing mole, or development of a new pigmented or unusual-looking growth on the skin. Melanomas

symptoms can happen anywhere on the body. Melanomas most often develop in areas that have had exposure to the sun. Review [ABCDE's of Skin Cancer](#) for more info.

Why does it matter?

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the US. It develops primarily on areas of sun-exposed skin, including the scalp, face, lips, ears, neck, chest, arms, and hands, and on the legs. If untreated, skin cancer can cause serious complications and be life-threatening. It's important to be educated on signs and symptoms of skin cancer to prevent this disease.

What can I do?

- › Educate yourself. Perform self-skin checks regularly so you can recognize any significant changes. Report changes to your doctor for further analysis.
- › Avoid tanning beds and direct sun exposure. The sun's rays are strongest between 10 am and 4 pm. Try to schedule outdoor activities for other times of the day.
- › Seek shade. Set up a shade sail, tent or oversized umbrella for yourself and children when playing outside.
- › Wear sunscreen. Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30, even on cloudy days. Apply sunscreen generously and reapply every two hours – or more often if you're swimming or perspiring.
- › Wear protective clothing, a broad-brimmed hat, and sunglasses that block both types of UV radiation.