



# Skin Cancer Fact Sheet

## About Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the US. Basal and squamous cell cancers are the most common types of skin cancers. Melanoma can be a more serious type of skin cancer.

## Risk Factors

- **Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays** Sunlight is the main source of UV rays. Tanning beds are another source of UV rays.
- **Having light-colored skin** Anyone can get skin cancer, but people with light-colored skin have a higher risk than people with naturally darker skin color.
- **Getting older** Anyone can get skin cancer, but the risk goes up as a person gets older.
- **Being male** Men are more likely than women to get skin cancer.
- **Having a weakened immune system** People with weakened immunity have an increased risk of skin cancer.
- **Moles** People with many moles may be at an increased risk for skin cancer.
- **Personal history** People who have already had skin cancer, and people who have other skin conditions, such as a skin injury, psoriasis, xeroderma, and certain inherited syndromes, have a higher risk of some types of skin cancer.
- **Radiation exposure** People who have had radiation treatment have a higher risk of developing skin cancer in the area that received the treatment.
- **Exposure to certain chemicals** Being exposed to large amounts of arsenic increases the risk of developing skin cancer.

## Prevention

There is no sure way to prevent skin cancer, and some risk factors can't be changed, such as age, race, and personal history of disease. But there are things a person can do to help lower their risk.

- **Limit being exposed to ultraviolet (UV) rays.**
  - Seek shade whenever possible.
  - Avoid the sun when UV rays are strongest, usually between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
  - Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30.
  - Wear clothes to protect the skin, such as long sleeves and long pants.
  - Cover the head with a wide-brimmed hat that shades the face, neck, and ears.
  - Put on wrap-around sunglasses that have UV protection for the eyes and skin around them.
  - Avoid sunbathing, tanning beds, and sun lamps.
  - Protect children even more, since they tend to spend more time outdoors. Severe sunburns in childhood may increase the risk of melanoma.
- **Avoid exposure to harmful chemicals like arsenic, which can increase the risk of skin cancer.**
- **Check skin regularly to spot any new growths or areas, and report them to a doctor right away.**

## Early Detection

Even though the American Cancer Society does not have guidelines for the early detection of skin cancer, everyone should know their own skin. People should learn the patterns of moles, blemishes, freckles, and other marks on their skin so that they can notice any changes.

Many doctors recommend checking the skin, preferably once a month. Skin self-exams are best done in a well-lit room in front of a full-length mirror. Use a hand-held mirror for areas that are hard to see.

Any spots on the skin that are new or changing in size, shape, or color should be checked by a doctor.

## Signs and Symptoms

Signs of skin cancer may include changes in the size, shape, or color of a mole or other skin lesion; or a new growth on the skin. Changes that continue over a month or more should be checked by a doctor.

Basal cell skin cancers may appear as a growth that is flat, or a small, raised pink or red shiny area. Basal cell cancers might bleed after an injury.

Squamous cell cancers may appear as a growth or lump, often with a rough surface, or as a flat, reddish patch that grows slowly.

Melanoma may appear as a new spot on the skin or a spot that is changing in size, shape, or color. Other signs of melanoma include a sore that doesn't heal, or symptoms of changes in the skin around a mole, such as itchiness, tenderness, or pain.

## Treatment

Treatment for skin cancer depends on the type and stage of the cancer, special testing that might be done on the tumor, as well as the person's age, other health problems, and personal choices. People who are diagnosed with skin cancer should discuss all treatment options and make informed treatment decisions together with their doctors.

## Living With Skin Cancer

From the time a person is diagnosed with skin cancer, their quality of life is affected in some way. Different physical, social, psychological, spiritual, and financial issues come up at any time during the cancer experience and after treatment is over.

Some types of skin cancer, especially melanoma, can be serious. Palliative care is focused on helping to improve the quality of life and dealing with issues that people living with a serious illness might have. People with advanced melanoma may benefit from having palliative care at any time from the point of diagnosis, throughout treatment, and beyond.

Good communication between a person with cancer and the health care team is important and involves:

- Asking and answering questions
- Working together to set care goals
- Making shared decisions
- Managing side effects and other issues
- Making sure to schedule follow-up tests and care

**To learn more, visit [www.cancer.org/cancer/skin-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/skin-cancer.html).**



[cancer.org](http://cancer.org) | 1.800.227.2345

©2020, American Cancer Society, Inc.  
No. 080768 Rev. 4/20  
Models used for illustrative purposes only.

