



Cancer

fact sheet

Cancer
AnswerLine™

SKIN CANCER - WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS AND SYMPTOMS?

Skin cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal skin cells. It occurs when unrepaired DNA damage to skin cells (most often caused by ultraviolet radiation from sunshine or tanning beds) triggers mutations, or genetic defects, that lead the skin cells to multiply rapidly and form malignant tumors. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. (Source: Skin Cancer Foundation).

TYPES OF SKIN CANCER

- Basal cell carcinoma (BCC) is the most common form of skin cancer.
- Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) is the second most common form of skin cancer.
- Melanoma accounts for less than two percent of skin cancer cases, but the vast majority of skin cancer deaths. Of the seven most common cancers in the U.S., melanoma is the only one whose incidence is increasing.

A risk factor is anything that affects a person's chance of getting a disease such as cancer. In addition to exposure to UV-A and UV-B rays, other risk factors for skin cancer include:

- Family or personal history of skin cancer
- Having fair skin
- Having light hair and light eyes
- Having freckled skin
- A history of sunburns
- Male gender
- Having a large number of moles (also known as nevi)
- Having a weak immune system
- Previous exposure to arsenic
- Previous radiation treatment
- Having Xeroderma pigmentosum

CHECK YOUR SKIN

- Learn how to do a skin self-exam and check your skin once a month.
- Have regular skin exams by a doctor.

SYMPTOMS TO LOOK FOR:

A - Asymmetry: Is the skin change even or is one side different from the other?

B - Borders: Are the edges even and smooth or irregular?

C - Color: Is it all one color throughout or a mix of colors?

D - Diameter: Is the area larger than the size of a pencil eraser?

E - Evolving - Have there been any continual changes in asymmetry, color, borders, or size?



The Skin Cancer Foundation has this useful picture guide, skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information to show skin changes.

If you do find new or concerning skin changes, be sure to alert your healthcare provider.

SKIN CANCER PREVENTION STEPS

The good news is skin cancer is very preventable! The Skin Cancer Foundation has always recommended using a sunscreen with an SPF 15 or higher as one important part of a complete sun protection regimen. Sunscreen alone is not enough, however. To protect yourself, follow these skin cancer prevention tips:

- Seek the shade, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Do not burn.
- Avoid tanning and UV tanning booths.
- Cover up with clothing, including a broad-brimmed hat and UV-blocking sunglasses.
- Use a broad spectrum (UVA/UVB) sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher every day. For extended outdoor activity, use a water-resistant, broad spectrum (UVA/UVB) sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher.
- Apply 1 ounce (2 tablespoons) of sunscreen to your entire body 30 minutes before going outside.
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours or immediately after swimming or excessive sweating.
- Keep newborns out of the sun. Sunscreens should only be used on babies over the age of six months.
- Examine your skin head-to-toe every month.
- See your physician every year for a professional skin exam.

If you have further questions about learning about skin cancer, feel free to call an experienced oncology nurse at the Cancer AnswerLine™ at 800-865-1125 or contact via email at OPE-CancerAnswerLine@med.umich.edu.