



Patient Education

Mitchell B. Dunn, MD

2021 K St. NW #512
Washington, DC 20006

Phone 202-293-3636
Fax 202-293-0289

Skin Cancer

It almost seems as though we are having an epidemic of skin cancer. On routine examinations over the past four years, I have found melanoma - a potentially fatal form of skin cancer - in nine patients. Two of these patients were under the age of thirty!! What this means is that we must all be aware of this serious problem and take the appropriate steps to prevent it. Although many skin cancers are preventable, we're probably not doing enough about it. Unfortunately, the rate of skin cancer really has been going up so that today, more than one in five Americans will develop some form of skin cancer. The American Cancer Society blames this epidemic of skin cancer on our love of the sun and tanning. There is just no safe way of soaking up the sun's UV-A and UV-B rays or those emitted by tanning machines without raising our risk for skin cancer. There are basically two ways of approaching this very serious problem. The first is through prevention, and the second is by early detection.

Prevention of Skin Cancer: To play it safe give yourself the best chance of avoiding skin cancer.

- First and foremost, avoid or block the sun. This is best accomplished by staying out of the sun or covering up. Cover up with clothing and broad-rimmed hats.
- Use a sun-blocking agent or a sunscreen. At a minimum, the lotion should have a sun-protection factor (SPF) of 15. During the summer or in times when you are exposed to intense sun, consider putting on lotion with SPF of 30 or higher. Put the lotion on your face, hands and any other part of your body that is frequently exposed. Reapply it every two to three hours, or after swimming or perspiring. Areas that are often not protected include the ears and nose. Many people get skin cancers here even if they routinely wear hats because these areas are not shaded by the typical caps that many people wear. Another common place for skin cancer is the back of the hands since this area is frequently exposed to sunlight even if you are wearing a long sleeved shirt.
- Be aware that UV rays reflect from sand, snow and concrete, and they penetrate water, clouds and wet or some types of clothing.
- Avoid tanning parlors altogether!!!

If you can't live without a tan, at least be sure to acquire it slowly--over a period of many days or weeks, sunbathing only before 10 a.m. or after 3 p.m., when the sun is less intense. Don't get a sunburn - it's like issuing an invitation to cancer. If you have a fair or freckled complexion, blond or red hair, and blue eyes, you should avoid the sun's rays as much as possible--you're at the highest risk for melanoma. Take special care if you have moles - review the pictures on the following page. Pay attention to any flat, scaly, reddish patches (actinic keratoses) on your skin. They can be precursors to squamous cell carcinoma. Research indicates that even a few severe sunburns in our first 20 years can contribute to melanoma later. Although we cannot do anything about the sun exposure we had as children, be particularly careful to protect your children against excess light exposure.

Early Detection of Skin Cancer: There are basically two ways that we can detect skin cancer. The first is through your physical exam in my office (or with a dermatologist) and the second is by regularly examining your skin yourself. Below I have listed the main types of skin cancers and what you should be looking for. I am particularly concerned about melanoma and have included pictures of what

This handout is intended for the personal use of my patients. No part of this handout may be reproduced in any form without my written permission.

characterizes moles that should be removed. If you have any suspicious areas on your skin and particularly if you have any changing moles, be sure to bring them to my attention right away.

There are three types of skin cancer:

1. **Basal cell carcinoma** accounts for about 75 percent of skin cancer cases. It is characterized by raised, translucent bumps that may crust, ulcerate and sometimes bleed.
2. **Squamous cell carcinoma** accounts for about 20 percent of skin cancer. These tumors look like raised, pink patches and may ooze or bleed in the center.
3. **Malignant melanoma** is the least common—5 percent of skin cancer cases—but the most deadly. It kills about a fourth of the people who have it. Melanomas typically start out as small brown or black patches on the skin. They may look like moles or occur at the site of moles. People who have numerous moles, are very fair skinned, or have a family history of melanoma are at increased risk of developing melanoma. Basal cell and squamous cell cancers most often occur on the sun-exposed parts of the body—the nose, lips, neck, edge of ears and hands. Melanomas often occur here as well but frequently occur at other sites that are not particularly exposed to sun (especially the chest, abdomen and back).

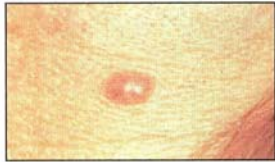
As part of your physical examination with me, I will thoroughly inspect your entire body for skin cancer (as long as you will let me). This includes areas that you may not regularly check yourself – such as your back, arm pits, the back of your legs and your feet and toes. If I find any suspicious areas, I will refer you to a dermatologist for further evaluation.

In addition to a physician's examination, we will need your help in early detection process by having you perform regular skin self-examination. This can be done by inspecting your entire body either alone, with the help of a mirror, or with the help of your spouse or friend. Be sure to examine your scalp, behind the ears, your back, and the back of your legs. If you want further help in how to perform a skin self-exam, be sure to ask me during your physical. On the right are a few pictures that demonstrate the features of melanoma (even though they are in black and white they are still useful). For more information or for more pictures that might be helpful, consider contacting the organizations listed below. They can also be contacted via the internet. Please remember - the cure rate for skin cancer would be nearly 100 percent if brought to a doctor's attention and treated early before it has a chance to spread.

The American Cancer Society (ACS). Call (800) ACS-2345 or (800) 227-2345 for free brochures.
American Academy of Dermatology. Send a stamped, self-addressed business-size envelope to AAD, Department of Communications, P.O. Box 681069, Schaumburg, IL 60168 for free brochures on skin cancer and sun protection. Specify the information you want when ordering.

Thinking of “ABCD” can help you remember what to watch for:

A Asymmetry—The shape of one half does not match the other.

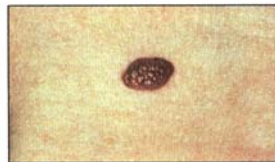


Normal



Melanoma

B Border—The edges are ragged, notched, or blurred.

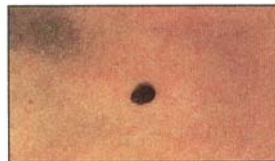


Normal



Melanoma

C Color—The color is uneven. Shades of black, brown, and tan may be present. Areas of white, grey, red, or blue also may be seen.



Normal



Melanoma

D Diameter—There is a change in size.



Normal



Melanoma