

Skin Cancer Symptoms and Diagnosis

When we were kids, we spent endless days under the summer sun, without a care in the world. We know better today, and everyone is careful to cover up and protect our skin from damage by the sun's harmful UV rays.

Skin cancer is a potentially fatal condition caused by exposure to the sun. There are different types of skin cancer, each having its own particular appearance. For example, non-melanoma skin cancer often starts as a small red or pink lump in the shape of a dome. Other types may first appear as a small crusted or scaly area of the skin, sitting on a red or a pink base.

For the most part, melanoma begins as a dark spot or a mole on the skin. There are other symptoms to be aware of, including swollen lymph nodes that can occur if the melanoma spreads to other parts of the body.

It's important to know the symptoms that may indicate the presence of skin cancer. These skin cancer symptoms can include a spot or lesion that:

- * Changes size
- * Develops an irregular shape
- * Becomes inflamed
- * Develops an irregular color
- * Oozes
- * Feels different to the touch
- * Develops an ulcer

If you find any of these symptoms, DON'T PANIC. Just because you have one of these signs doesn't necessarily mean that you have developed skin cancer. Just to be safe, you should always visit your doctor ASAP to have any abnormality checked. This is to ensure your peace of mind, and to begin treatment if there is a problem. Don't ignore the problem.

While extensive research continues to be done on the matter, the cause of skin cancer still remains a gray area. Most scientists agree, however, that prolonged exposure to intensive ultraviolet rays from the sun is probably the main risk factor. This is particularly true for those who have fair skin that burns easily. People who have brown, olive or darker complexions generally have a lower risk of developing skin cancer, although the risk is still there. Everyone should be using a good sun block at all times when outdoors.

There are other factors that can increase the risk of a person developing skin cancer, including:

- * Skin with an excessive number of moles
- * Family history of skin cancer
- * Blond or red hair
- * Freckles
- * Severe sunburn during childhood
- * Use of a sun bed or tanning lamp
- * Working outdoors under increased exposure to sunlight, as compared to indoor work.

If you have arranged an examination for skin abnormalities, your general practitioner will carefully examine you and your suspect skin areas to check whether he or she thinks you have any type of skin tumor. If the doctor decides that you are at risk, you will likely be sent to see a dermatologist or an Oncologist, another doctor specializing in cancer. Further tests will be performed to establish the cause for your symptoms.

To make a diagnosis of cancer, one or more of the following tests may be performed:

Biopsy: The doctor removes the suspect skin lesion, or takes a small sample of the tissue with a fine needle. This sample is sent to a medical lab for examination to ascertain whether it is a cancer and if so, what type it is.

X-rays and CAT Scan: A CAT (computerized axial tomography) Scan and X-ray can provide your practitioner with information about the cancer, such as how far it has spread.

Sentinel Node Biopsy: For this test, the doctor removes the lymph node closest to the melanoma. An examination of the lymph node will then take place to verify whether you have any form of cancer.

There are several types and degrees of skin cancer, and many are treatable. If you find any of the symptoms of skin cancer on your body, see your doctor right away. It's better to play it safe and get the treatment you need as soon as possible.