

## *Skin Cancer*

More than one million cases of skin cancer will be reported in the United States this year alone. In fact, Texas ranks third in the nation for reported incidences of malignant melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer. While skin cancer is the most common form of cancer, it is also the most preventable through limiting exposure to the harmful ultra-violet rays of the sun.

### **Statistics**

- One in three Texans will develop skin cancer in the course of his/her lifetime.
- Between 40 and 50 percent of Americans 65 or older will have skin cancer at least once.
- There are several types of skin cancer, but melanoma is the most deadly. Two of the most common types of skin cancer – basal cell (BCC) and squamous cell carcinomas (SCC) – are highly curable.
- Melanoma is the third most common skin cancer and is increasing at a rate faster than almost any other cancer.
- Use of tanning beds before the age of 35 increases the melanoma risk by 75 percent.

### **Risk Factors**

- **Ultraviolet (UV) Light Exposure:** Sunlight is the main source of ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which can damage the genes in skin cells and cause skin cancer.
- **Indoor Tanning:** Sunlamps and tanning beds do emit UV radiation, which can cause skin damage and have been linked to melanoma. People who use tanning beds are 2.5 times more likely to develop squamous cell carcinoma and 1.5 times more likely to develop basal cell carcinoma.
- **Fair Skin:** People with fair skin are at a higher risk of developing skin cancer, especially fair-skinned individuals with freckles and/or blue eyes and red hair. However everyone is at risk of developing skin cancer and should take precautions. In fact, approximately 7 percent of all skin cancer cases occur in patients of Hispanic, African-American, Asian-American, or Native American descent. Those with fair skin and family histories of melanoma (skin cancer) should seek routine, annual skin cancer screenings with a dermatologist.

### **Symptoms and Signs**

The most common warning sign of skin cancer is a change in the surface of the skin. It is important to have any mole that has changed checked by a dermatologist. The ABCD rule can help guide you when checking your skin.

- **A = Asymmetry:** One side of the mole does not match the other in size, shape, color, or thickness.
- **B = Border:** The edge or border of the mole may be irregular.
- **C = Color:** The color of the mole is not uniform, various shades of brown and black may be present.
- **D = Diameter:** Skin cancer melanomas are usually larger than 6 millimeters in diameter, but they can be smaller.

### **Tips for Prevention**

- **Limit Exposure:** Practice sun safety when you are outdoors. Avoid being outdoors in sunlight too long, particularly in between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when UV light is strongest.
- **Protect Your Skin:** Long-sleeved shirts, long pants, or long skirts are the most protective. Use sunscreens and lip balms with SPF 15 or more on areas of skin exposed to the sun, especially when the sunlight is strong. Reapply every two hours or according to the product label. Use sunscreen even on hazy days or days with light or broken cloud cover because the UV light still comes through.
- **Wear a Hat:** A hat with at least a 2- to 3-inch brim all around can protect areas exposed to the sun, such as the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp. Straw hats are not recommended unless they are tightly woven.
- **Wear Sunglasses:** Wrap-around sunglasses with at least 99 percent UV absorption provide the best protection for the eyes and the skin area around the eyes. Look for sunglasses labeled as blocking UVA and UVB light.

### **Treatment Options**

Often basal cell and squamous cell cancers can be completely cured by fairly minor surgery. Some can be cured by using medicine on the skin. The type of treatment depends on how large the cancer is, where it is found on the body, and in some cases, the exact type of skin cancer. For certain squamous cell cancers with a high risk of spreading, surgery might be followed by radiation or chemotherapy.

*Sources: The Skin Cancer Foundation, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and American Cancer Society*



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