

Skin Cancer

According to the American Cancer Society's Cancer Facts and Figures 2009, more than 1 million cases of skin cancer will be reported in the United States this year alone. In fact, Texas ranked third in the nation last year for reported incidence of melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer. While skin cancer is the most common form of cancer, it is also very preventable through limiting exposure to the harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun.

Statistics

- One in three Texans will develop skin cancer over the course of his/her lifetime.
- Between 40 and 50 percent of Americans 65 or older will have non-melanoma 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 (SCC) carcinomas– are highly curable if caught early.
- Melanoma is the third most common skin cancer, and rates of this cancer form have increased over a 30-year period.
- Use of tanning beds before the age of 35 increases melanoma risk by 75 percent.

Risk Factors

- **UV Light Exposure:** Sunlight is the main source of UV radiation, which can damage the genes in skin cells and cause skin cancer.
- **Indoor Tanning:** Sunlamps and tanning beds emit UV radiation, which can cause skin damage and have been linked to melanoma. Tanning beds increase a person's risk of developing squamous cell carcinoma by 2.5 times, and they increase the risk of developing basal cell carcinoma by 1.5 times.
- **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 light hair. However, everyone is at risk of developing skin cancer and should take precautions. In fact, though melanoma is less frequently diagnosed among African Americans, Latinos, and Asians than Caucasians, it is often diagnosed later in and is often fatal for these populations. 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 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 with SPF 30 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 UV light still permeates.
- **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 may allow UV rays through, so refrain from wearing these unless the weave is tight.
- **Wear Sunglasses:** Wrap-around sunglasses with at least 99 percent UV absorption provide the best protection for the eyes and the skin 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 for any skin cancer, including melanoma, depends on how large the cancer is, its type, and where it is found on the body. 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, Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, and American Cancer Society



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