

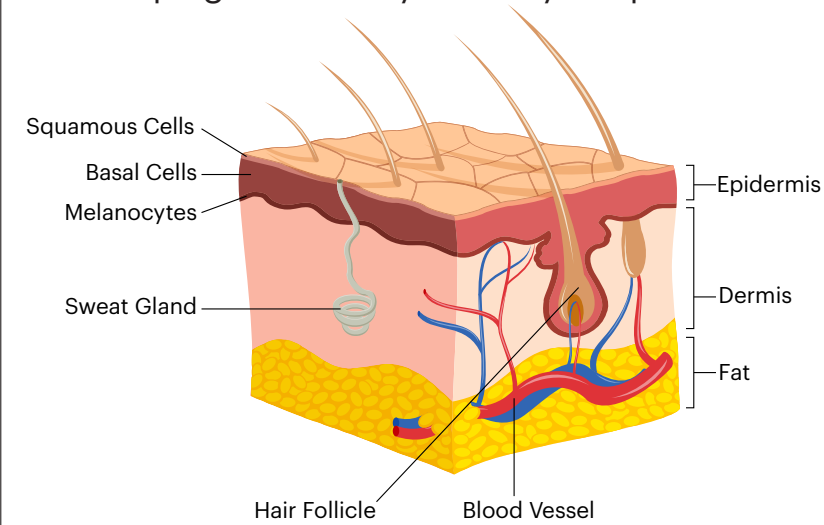


Skin Cancer 101

The Skin Cancer Foundation is here to provide you with the tools you need to prevent, detect and treat skin cancer. If you see anything new, changing or unusual on your skin, see a dermatologist.

SKIN: YOUR LARGEST ORGAN

The skin is the largest organ in the human body. It forms a waterproof, protective wrap over your entire body, serving as a barrier to infection and helping to control your body temperature.



Skin Facts

The average adult human has a skin surface area between 16.1 and 21.5 square feet. In just a square inch of skin, there are approximately:
• 60,000 melanocytes, which give skin its color
• 1,000 nerve endings
• 650 sweat glands
• 20 blood vessels

WHAT IS SKIN CANCER?

Skin cancer is the out-of-control growth of abnormal cells in the epidermis, the outermost skin layer, caused by unrepaired DNA damage that triggers mutations. These mutations lead the skin cells to multiply rapidly and form malignant tumors.

The two main causes of skin cancer are the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays and the use of UV indoor tanning beds. The good news is that if skin cancer is caught early, your dermatologist can treat it with little or no scarring and high odds of eliminating it entirely. Often, the doctor may even detect the growth at a precancerous stage, before it has become a full-blown skin cancer or penetrated below the surface of the skin.

Basal Cell Carcinoma

This is the **most common** form of skin cancer, with an estimated 3.6 million cases in the U.S. diagnosed each year. Basal cell carcinomas (BCCs) are abnormal, uncontrolled growths that arise from the skin's basal cells in the epidermis. These cancers most often develop on skin areas typically exposed to the sun, especially the face, ears, neck, scalp, shoulders and back. Most BCCs are caused by the combination of intermittent, intense exposure and cumulative, long-term exposure to UV radiation from the sun. BCCs can be locally destructive if not detected and treated early. Occasionally these cancers metastasize (spread) and in very rare instances they can be fatal.

Basal Cell Carcinomas



A shiny bump, or nodule, that is pearly or translucent and is often pink, red, white or clear. The bump can also be brown, especially in skin of color.

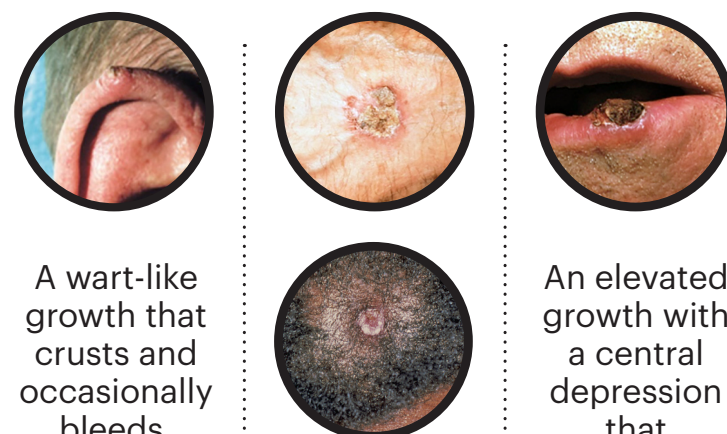
An open sore that bleeds, oozes or crusts and doesn't heal for three or more weeks may be a sign of a BCC. It might also have a slightly elevated, rolled border and a crusted central indentation.

A reddish, irritated or crusty patch that may itch or hurt. Other BCCs may look like white, yellow or waxy scars.

Squamous Cell Carcinoma

This is the **second most common form** of skin cancer. Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) is an uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells arising from the squamous cells in the epidermis. An estimated 1.8 million cases of SCC are diagnosed each year in the U.S. Cumulative, long-term exposure to UV radiation from the sun and indoor tanning causes most SCCs. They are common on sun-exposed areas such as the ears, face, scalp, neck and hands, where the skin often reveals signs of sun damage, including wrinkles and age spots. SCCs can sometimes grow rapidly and metastasize if not detected and treated early. As many as 15,000 deaths occur from invasive SCC of the skin each year in the U.S.

Squamous Cell Carcinomas



A wart-like growth that crusts and occasionally bleeds.

A persistent, scaly patch that sometimes crusts or bleeds.

An elevated growth with a central depression that occasionally bleeds. It may rapidly increase in size.

Actinic Keratoses

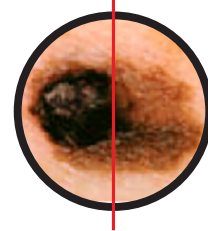
The most common type of precancerous skin lesion, actinic keratosis (AK), typically appears on skin that has been frequently exposed to the sun or to artificial UV light from tanning beds. AKs often occur on the face, lips, ears, scalp, back of the hands and forearms. They typically feel rough to the touch and look like pink, white or tan scaly or crusty patches, red bumps, protruding sores or cracks with dried blood. Left untreated, 10 percent or more may turn into squamous cell carcinomas, so treatment by a dermatologist is recommended.

Melanoma

Melanoma is a cancer that develops from melanocytes, the skin cells that produce melanin pigment, which gives skin its color.

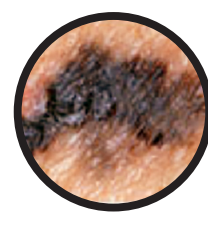
The **most dangerous** of the three most common forms of skin cancer, melanoma is often triggered by the kind of intense, intermittent sun exposure that leads to sunburn. Tanning bed use also increases risk for melanoma. Melanomas often resemble moles and sometimes may arise from them. The disease has a very high chance of being cured if found and removed early. Nearly 187,000 cases of melanoma are estimated to be diagnosed in the U.S. in 2023, about 98,000 of them invasive. When melanoma progresses, it can spread to vital organs, and it causes about 8,000 deaths in the U.S. each year.

The ABCDEs of Melanoma



A is for Asymmetry

Most melanomas are asymmetrical: a line through the middle would not create matching halves. Common moles are usually round and symmetrical.



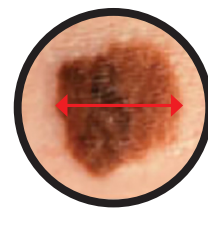
B is for Border

Melanoma borders tend to be uneven and may have scalloped or notched edges. Common moles tend to have smoother, more even borders.



C is for Color

Multiple colors are a warning sign. While benign moles are usually a single shade of brown, a melanoma may have different shades of brown, tan or black. As it grows, the colors red, white or blue may also appear.



D is for Diameter or Dark

It is a warning sign if a lesion is the size of a pencil eraser (about 6 mm, or ¼ inch, in diameter) or larger. It is also important to look for any lesion, no matter what size, that is darker than others.



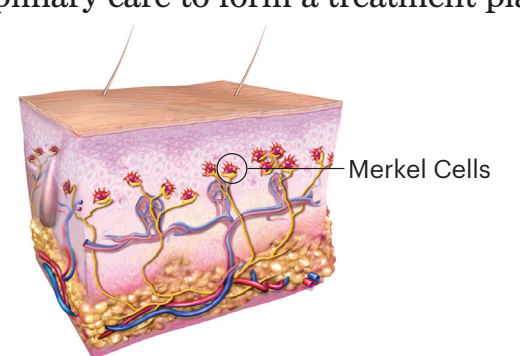
E is for Evolving

Any change in size, shape, color or elevation of a spot on your skin, or any new symptom in it, such as bleeding, itching or crusting, is a warning sign to see your doctor.

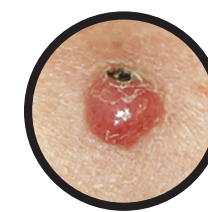
Merkel Cell Carcinoma

Merkel cell carcinoma (MCC) is a **rare, aggressive skin cancer** that is at high risk of recurring and spreading (metastasizing), often within two to three years after initial diagnosis.

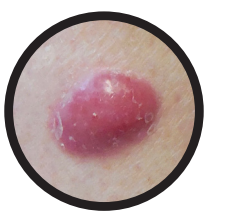
About 3,000 new cases of MCC and about 700 deaths from it occur in the U.S. each year. Approximately 80 percent of MCCs are associated with a virus called the Merkel cell polyomavirus, while 20 percent are caused by UV radiation. These tumors often appear on sun-exposed areas of the body. They are not nearly as distinctive as other skin cancers and can appear as a pearly, pimple-like lump, sometimes skin-colored, red, purple or bluish-red, though they are rarely tender to the touch. They can advance rapidly, which is often what causes patients and doctors to take notice. Because MCC can be dangerous, it is important to take a diagnosis seriously and act quickly to find multidisciplinary care to form a treatment plan.



Merkel Cell Carcinomas



A recurrence of Merkel cell carcinoma on the forehead.



Merkel cell carcinoma on the lower leg.

ONE IN FIVE AMERICANS will develop skin cancer by the age of 70. Knowledge is your greatest weapon in fighting it.

This primer gives you an overview of the major types of skin cancer and the precancers that can develop into skin cancer if left untreated.

Let us help!

SkinCancer.org

Atypical Moles (also known as DYSPLASTIC NEVI)

Atypical moles are pigmented lesions that appear different from common moles and often resemble melanomas. Though the vast majority will never become malignant, they are more likely than ordinary moles to develop into melanomas. For this reason, a dermatologist should check them regularly, especially if they grow larger, change in color or shape, or take on any new traits such as itching, flaking or oozing. People with atypical moles have an increased risk of developing melanoma, whether in the mole itself or elsewhere on the body. Those with 10 or more have 12 times the risk of developing melanoma compared with the general population.