

Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. About 1 out of 5 people will develop skin cancer in their lifetime.

Finding skin cancer early can make your treatment more successful. Be familiar with your skin and report any changes to your doctor. It may help to know the features of the most common types of skin cancer. Skin cancer symptoms are different depending on the type of skin cancer and its location on the skin.

Precancer

Actinic Keratosis

Actinic keratosis, or solar keratosis, is a precancerous condition. This means you have abnormal skin cells that are at a higher risk of developing into cancer. Actinic keratosis can develop into squamous cell carcinoma.

- It appears as rough, red or brown, scaly patches on the skin. You may feel the rough patches more than you see them.
- It most often occurs on sun-exposed areas of the body, but it can occur on other parts of the body.



Actinic keratosis
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Skin Cancer Types

Basal Cell Carcinoma

Basal cell carcinoma is the most common type of skin cancer. Basal cell cancer is slow growing and does not usually spread to other parts of the body. Without treatment, it can spread to nearby areas, including bone and other tissues under the skin. A person with basal cell cancer is at risk of developing another basal cell carcinoma at other body sites.

- It appears as a small, pink bump or patch on the head or neck, although it may be found on any part of the body.
- If untreated it may break open the skin, bleed or crust over.



Basal cell carcinoma

Squamous Cell Carcinoma

Squamous cell carcinoma is the second most common type of skin cancer. It may be more aggressive than basal cell carcinoma. It is more likely to grow deep below the skin and spread to other parts of the body.

- It can look like basal cell cancer, but it is usually scaly and rougher.
- It often occurs on areas of the skin with sun damage, such as the head and neck, ears, lips and the backs of arms and hands.
- It can develop in other skin areas and may look like scars or ulcers.



- Squamous cell carcinoma is the most common skin cancer in people who receive organ transplants.

Squamous cell carcinoma

Melanoma

Melanoma is less common than basal or squamous cell carcinoma, but it is more dangerous.

- It usually appears as an irregular brown, black or red spot or a mole that changes size, shape or color.
- On white males, melanoma appears most often on the trunk of the body.
- On white females, melanoma appears most often on the lower leg.
- Melanoma is rare in people with dark skin. The most common places it may appear are the palms of the hand, the soles of the feet and the skin under nails.



Melanoma

Screening Guidelines

MD Anderson's skin cancer screening guidelines are based on your personal risk of skin cancer.
Talk with your doctor to determine your risk level.

General Skin Cancer Screening

- Pay close attention to your skin.
- Show your doctor **right away** if you see any of the following:
 - Unusual skin area
 - Sore that does not heal
 - Change in a mole or freckle

If you are at high risk of having skin cancer, get a complete skin evaluation by your doctor every year.

You are considered high risk if you have any of the following:

- Red hair and freckling
- Little or no pigment in your eyes, skin or hair (albinism)
- More than 50 moles
- Family history of melanoma
- Genetic syndromes linked with increased sun sensitivity
- Exposure to large amounts of natural sunlight, such as working or tanning outside
- History of using tanning beds or sun lamps
- History of blistering sunburn
- Personal history of abnormal moles (dysplastic nevi)
- Personal history of actinic keratosis
- Personal history of basal cell cancer
- Personal history of squamous cell skin cancer
- Prior radiation therapy
- Immunosuppressive therapy, especially after an organ transplant

Check Your Skin

Check your skin once a month for unusual spots, new growths and changes. Before or after a shower is a good time to check your skin. You will need good lighting and a mirror.

- Start with your head and face. Continue down, checking the front and back of your entire body. A friend can help check your back and scalp.
- Check the palms of your hands and fingernails. Bend your elbows to check the front and back of your forearms and upper arms.
- Check the back and front of your legs.
- Check between your buttocks and around your genital area.
- Sit and closely look at your feet. Check the soles of your feet, between your toes and your toenails.

To check your skin, remember the **ABCDE**F's of moles.

- **A**symmetry: Does half of the mole or colored skin spot look different from the other half?
- **B**order: Is the border of the mole uneven?
- **C**olor: Is the color uneven, with shades of 1 or more colors? Has the color changed over time?
- **D**iameter: Is the mole larger than a pencil eraser?
- **E**volution: Has the mole or spot changed? Is it now raised above the skin?
- **F**eeling: Has the feeling around the mole changed? Does it itch? Is it painful?

Talk with your doctor or dermatologist if you notice any changes or unusual moles.

Prevention

Take steps to prevent skin cancer. These include:

- **Do not** use sunlamps or tanning beds.
- Stay indoors to limit sun exposure, especially between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. The sun's rays are the strongest during these hours.
- Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher that protects against UVA and UVB rays.
- Apply sunscreen every day. Make it a daily routine. Apply a generous amount of sunscreen for the most protection. Commonly missed body parts are the lips, tops of ears, head, back of neck, hands and feet.
- Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going into the sun and reapply every 2 hours.
- Wear protective clothing such as a wide-brimmed hat, long-sleeved shirt, long pants and sunglasses with UV protection.
- Stay in the shade. Avoid reflective surfaces such as water, sand, snow and concrete.
- Be careful even on cloudy days. You can still get sunburned.

Ask your care team for more information on skin cancer prevention.