

Facial Surgery Center Information Packet

Basal Cell Carcinoma

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What is basal cell carcinoma?

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC) is a slow growing type of skin cancer. Skin cancer occurs when cancer cells are found in the layers of the skin. Normal cells divide in a planned way, making more cells only when needed. Cancer cells grow and divide without control or order, often making a lump or bump, which is called a tumor. Some cancer cells spread to other parts of the body, but basal skin cancer cells usually do not.

Most skin cancers show up after a person is 40 to 50 years old. BCC is found more often in fair skinned, light-haired people who are in the sun a lot. Farmers, ranchers and golfers are examples of people who are more likely to get skin cancer. Other skin cancers include squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) and melanoma.

What causes BCC?

The main cause of skin cancer is ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun. Sun lamps and tanning booths that use man-made UV rays can also cause skin cancer. People who have been around certain chemicals a lot may have a greater chance of getting skin cancer. People who also have a weak immune system have a higher risk. People may have weak immune systems if they have had an organ transplant or have certain diseases. If others in your family have BCC, you also are more likely to get it.

What are the signs and symptoms of BCC?

Common warning signs include a sore that does not heal or a new, raised bump on the skin. This tumor usually looks smooth, shiny, pale or waxy. Another kind of bump may look like a scar. The scar-like bump usually looks red and feels hard and usually will not heal. BCC is most often on the neck, face or back of hands since this skin is exposed to the sun more. Skin cancer also shows up often on the arms, chest and upper back.

How is BCC diagnosed and treated?

You may first need a biopsy to have a piece of the tumor or sore removed. The tissue is sent to a lab for testing to see if cancer cells are present. Once cancer cells are found, tests are performed to find out what type of cancer it is and how much it has grown. The tumor or sore may need to be removed using heat, surgery, laser therapy or freezing. BCC may also be treated with radiation or chemotherapy. If a large area of skin is removed, you may need a skin graft to help the wound close and heal.

How can I take care of my skin?

- Do not use tanning booths. These can damage your skin as much as the sun.
- Look for new bumps on your skin once a month. A mole is a small, dark bump on the skin. Most normal moles appear on the skin by the time you are 30 to 40 years old. A mole that shows up after 30 years of age should be watched closely for changes. Know what your regular birthmarks and moles look like.

- Check all parts of your body. Skin cancer can also grow on the skin that is not in the sun. These include your scalp and between your toes and buttocks. Also look for moles on the palms of your hands, soles of your feet, or your lips and gums. Women should check the skin around your vagina monthly.
- The best time to look for new bumps is after a shower or bath. Make sure you do this in a room that has good light. Use either a full-length mirror or a mirror you can hold.

Protect your skin from the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays

- Wear sunscreen that has an SPF (sun protectant factor) of 15 or higher. The sunscreen should also have UVA and UVB protection. Follow the directions on the label when using sunscreen. Reapply sunscreen if you are in the sun for more than an hour. Also reapply sunscreen often if you go swimming or are sweating a lot.
- Stay out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. The sun is strongest and most damaging to your skin between these times. The sun is also strongest in the summer. Sun reflecting off of snow, concrete, or sand can be harmful too.
- Protect your lips by using lipsticks and lip balms that have sunscreen in them.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants to protect your arms and legs when you are in the sun. Wear a hat with a wide brim to protect both your face and neck.
- It is very important for parents to protect their children's skin from sun exposure and burns.

Follow these simple rules to protect your skin:

- Stay out of the sun or protect your skin whenever your shadow is shorter than you are.
- Put on sunscreen when you put on your sunglasses. Also, wear sunglasses with UVA and UVB protection.
- Slip! Slop! Slap! Slip on a shirt, slop on the sunscreen and slap on a hat!

For support and more information

- Accepting that you have cancer is hard. You and those close to you may feel angry, sad or frightened. These feelings are normal. Talk to your caregivers, family or friends about your feelings and let them help you. Encourage those close to you to talk to your caregiver about how things are at home. Your caregiver can help your family better understand how to support to a person with cancer.
- You may also want to join a cancer support group. Ask your caregiver for the names and numbers of support groups. You may also contact one of the following national organizations for more information:

- American Cancer Society
Phone: **1-800-227-2345**
<http://www.cancer.org>
- National Cancer Institute
Phone: **1-800-422-6237**
<http://www.cancer.gov>
- The Skin Cancer Foundation
245 5th Avenue, Suite 1403
New York, NY 10016
Phone: **1-800-754-6490**
www.skincancer.org

Care agreement

You have the right to help plan your care. To help with this plan, you must learn about your health condition and how it may be treated. You can then discuss treatment options with your caregivers. Work with them to decide what care may be used to treat you. You always have the right to refuse treatment.

Risks

Some treatments can cause unpleasant side effects. You could get an infection or bleed too much during a biopsy of the tumor. This does not happen often. Your chances of keeping the cancer from spreading are better if you are treated. The risks from this type of skin cancer are few. If the cancer is not treated, it can spread to other parts of your body and cause other health problems. Call your caregiver if you are worried or have questions about your care or medicine.

While you are here

- **Informed consent:** You have the right to understand your health condition in words that you know. You should be told what tests, treatments or procedures might be done to treat your condition. Your doctor should also tell you about the risks and benefits of each treatment. You may be asked to sign a consent form that gives caregivers permission to do certain tests, treatments or procedures. If you are unable to give your consent, someone who has your permission can sign this form for you. A consent form is a legal piece of paper that tells exactly what will be done to you. Before giving your consent, make sure all of your questions have been answered so that you understand what may happen.
- **Blood test:** You may need blood taken for tests. The blood can be taken from a blood vessel in your hand, arm or the bend in your elbow. It can give your caregivers more information about your health condition. You may need to have blood drawn more than once.
- **Local anesthesia:** Most biopsies may be preformed with local anesthesia to keep you pain free during your procedure.

- **IV:** When having IV anesthesia, an IV is placed in your vein for giving medicine or liquids. This tube is capped or connected to tubing and liquid.
- **Pulse oximeter:** This machine tells how much oxygen is in your blood. A cord with a clip or sticky strip is placed on your ear, finger or toe. The other end of the cord is hooked to a machine. Caregivers use this machine to see if you need more oxygen.

Medicines

- **Pain medicine:** You will be given a prescription for pain medication to use along with ibuprofen for the pain.
- **Antibiotics:** Antibiotics may be given to help treat or prevent an infection caused by germs called bacteria.

Treatment options

Your treatment may change if the cancer is not being controlled. This is often decided after you have tests. You may have one or more of the following treatments, alone or together:

- **Biopsy:** A biopsy is surgery to remove all or part of the tumor (growth) from your skin. The tumor will be sent to the lab for tests.
- **Laser therapy:** A narrow beam of light is used to take off or kill the cancer cells. It can be used to treat tumors in the outer layers of skin. You may be given medicine to numb the skin before therapy. There is usually very little scarring of the skin with laser therapy. You may have pain on the treated skin until it heals.
- **Radiation:** This is a treatment using X-rays or gamma rays to treat cancer. Radiation kills cancer and keeps the cancer from spreading. It also keeps cancer cells from dividing into new cells, which is one way that cancer spreads. Radiation may be used to treat tumors in hard-to-treat areas. Skin cancers on the eyelid, tips of the nose or ear may be treated with radiation. This kind of therapy may cause skin rashes or make the skin dry or red. The feel of your skin or its color may change years after being treated with radiation.
- **Skin grafting:** When a large or deep tumor is removed from the skin, a large wound and scar may form. To make the skin look better, a skin graft may be placed on the area where the cancer was removed. A skin graft is a thin piece of healthy skin that is removed from another part of the body. A skin graft can also help close the wound and decrease the amount of scarring.
- **Topical chemotherapy:** Chemotherapy is often called “chemo.” Topical means it is put on the skin as a lotion or cream. Topical chemo may be used to treat cancer that is in the outer layers of the skin. Topical chemo is put on the tumor to kill the cancer cells. Your skin may hurt and look very red while being treated. The treated skin does not usually scar badly.

After you leave

- Keep a written list of the medicines you take, the amounts, and when and why you take them. Bring the list of your medicines or the pill bottles when you see your caregivers. Do not take any medicines, over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, herbs or food supplements without first talking to caregivers.
- Always take your medicine as directed by caregivers. Call your caregiver if you think your medicines are not helping or if you feel you are having side effects. Do not quit taking your medicines until you discuss it with your caregiver.
- Your caregiver may give you topical chemotherapy medicine to put on areas of your skin that have BCC. Avoid putting this medicine on healthy parts of your skin. If the chemo lotion or cream spreads onto your healthy skin, use soap and water to wash it off the healthy skin right away. If the medicine gets on your clothes, wash your clothes right away.

Follow up visit information

Keep all appointments and write down any questions you have. This way you will remember to ask these questions during your next visit.

Call if:

- You get a temperature over 101 degrees Fahrenheit.
- You have signs of infections at the biopsy site, including redness, pain or pus.
- You have questions or concerns about your cancer, treatment or medicine.

Seek care immediately if:

- You have trouble breathing all of a sudden.
- You have chest pain.

