

# Facial Surgery Center Information Packet

## Melanoma

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## What is melanoma?

Melanoma, also called cutaneous melanoma or malignant melanoma, is the most serious type of skin cancer. Normally, the cells in our body divide only when needed. Cancer cells grow and divide without control or order, often making a lump or bump. This lump or bump is called a tumor. Melanoma can spread to other healthy parts of the body if not found immediately. Once it has spread, the cancer cells are harder to control.

## What causes melanoma?

Caregivers do not know exactly what causes melanoma. You are at a higher risk for getting melanoma if you spend time under the sun. You are also at higher risk of getting melanoma if:

- You or a close family member has had a melanoma before.
- You have had one or more blistering sunburns as a child or teenager.
- You have light colored skin, hair or eyes.
- Your freckles or moles increase in number or look different from before.
- Your skin burns rather than tans when you are in the sun.
- You have other skin diseases such as xeroderma pigmentosum.

## What are the signs and symptoms of melanoma?

Melanoma may appear as a new mole or in moles you already have. Men often get new moles on the skin between their shoulders and hips. Women usually get new moles on their arms and legs. Moles may also be found on the palms of the hands, the soles of the feet or under the nail bed.

## What should I look for when I look at my own skin?

Caregivers describe a melanoma based on the **ABCDE** system:

- **A**symmetry: If a line is drawn through the middle of the mole, the two halves are unequal.
- **B**order: The border of the mole is not smooth.
- **C**olor: the color can vary from blue, black, brown or red.
- **D**iameter: The size of the mole is larger than a pencil eraser.
- **E**volution: the mole changes in appearance and symptoms such as:
  - It bleeds or has fluid leaking (oozing) out.
  - It changes in size, shape or color.
  - It feels itchy, hard, lump, swollen or tender.
  - Let your caregiver know if you notice any change in the moles on your body.
  - The earlier a cancer is found, the better its chance of being treated and cured.

## How is melanoma diagnosed?

You may first need to have all or part of the lump removed. This is called a biopsy. The tissue will be sent to a lab for tests. If it is melanoma, these tests will tell you about the stage and level of the cancer.

The stage of the cancer describes how far it has spread. Stage zero is the earliest stage, and stage four is the most advanced. In stage four, the cancer has spread to other body organs. Melanoma can spread to the brain, lung, liver, bones or lymph nodes. Cancer that has spread is called metastatic, and is harder to treat.

The level of cancer is based on how thick and deep the melanoma is. Thin melanomas, and those that are not deep, have a better chance of being cured.

## You may need one or more of these other tests:

- Blood tests
- Chest X-ray
- Computerized pictures of the bone (bone scan) or skin (dermatoscopy)
- Ultrasound
- Lymph imaging studies

## How is melanoma treated?

- Melanoma is treated differently depending on whether or not it has spread to to other parts of the body.
- If the cancer **has not** spread, surgery to remove the tumor is the most common treatment.
- If the cancer **has** spread, you may need one or more of the following treatments:
  - Biological therapy medicine to help your immune system fight the cancer.
  - Chemotherapy medicine to kill cancer cells.
  - Radiation therapy (X-rays) to kill cancer cells.
  - Surgery to remove cancer cells.

## How should I take care of my skin?

### Protect your skin from the sun's ultraviolet (UVA and UVB) rays.

- Wear sunscreen that has a sun protectant factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. The sunscreen should also have UVA and UVB protection. Follow the directions on the label when using sunscreen. Put on more 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.
- 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 your face and neck.
- 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. Know what your regular birthmarks and moles look like. A new mole that appears on your skin after 30 years of age should be watched closely for changes.

## For support and information

Melanoma can be a life-changing disease for you and your family. Accepting that you have skin 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. Let them help you. Your caregiver can help your family better understand how to support a person with skin 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](http://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.

## Risk

Some treatments for melanoma cause unpleasant side effects. You could get an infection or bleed too much if the cancer is removed with surgery. If melanoma is not treated, it can spread to other parts of your body. Once cancer spreads, it is more difficult to treat, and other serious medical problems can develop. Call your caregiver if you are worried or have questions about your melanoma.

## 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 tests:** 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 also may need to have blood drawn more than once.
- **Chest X-rays:** This is a picture of your lungs and heart. Caregivers use it to see how your lungs and heart are doing. Caregivers may use the X-ray to look for signs of infection, like pneumonia, or to look for collapsed lungs. Chest X-rays may show tumors, broken ribs or fluid around the heart and lungs.
- **Heart monitor:** This is also called an electrocardiogram (ECG) or telemetry. Sticky pads are placed on your chest or different parts of your body. Each pad has a wire leading to a small portable box (telemetry unit), or to a TV-type screen. This lets caregivers see a tracing of the electrical activity of your heart. The monitor may help caregivers see problems with the way your heart is beating. Do not remove any wires or sticky pads without asking your caregiver first.
- **IV:** An IV is a tube placed in your vein for giving medicine or liquids. This tube is capped or connected to tubing and liquid.
- **Medicines:** Your caregiver may give you one or more of the following kinds of medicines:
  - **Antibiotics** help treat or prevent an infection caused by germs called bacteria.
  - **Pain medicine** may take away or decrease your pain. Medicine may be given regularly, or may only be given if you request it. Tell caregivers if your pain does not decrease enough for you to feel better. Do not wait to ask for your pain medicine until the pain is severe. The medicine may not work as well at controlling your pain if you wait too long to take it. Ask your caregiver for help getting out of bed if you feel tired or dizzy.

## Tests

**You may need one or more of these other tests:**

- **Abdominal ultrasound:** An abdominal ultrasound is a test to see inside your abdomen. Sound waves are used to show pictures of your abdomen on a TV-like monitor.
- **Bone scan:** This is a test to look at your bones. You are given a small, safe amount of radioactive dye in an IV. Pictures are then taken of your bones. Caregivers can look at the pictures for broken bones, infections or cancer in the bones.

- **CT (“CAT”) scan:** A special X-ray machine uses a computer to take pictures of your brain. It may be used to look at bones, muscles, brain tissue and blood vessels. You may be given dye before the pictures are taken. The dye is usually given in your IV. The dye may help your caregiver see the pictures better. People who are allergic to iodine or shellfish (lobster, crab or shrimp) may be allergic to some dyes. Tell the caregiver if you are allergic to shellfish, or if you have other allergies or medical conditions.

## Treatment options

Your treatment may change if cancer keeps growing and symptoms worsen. This is often decided after you have tests. You may have one or more of the following treatments:

- **Biologic therapy for cancer:** Biologic therapy is medicine given to help your body fight growing cancer cells. It may also make cancer cells weaker and easier to kill. You may need this medicine more than once. You may feel like you have the flu during this therapy.
- **Biopsy:** Caregivers will first clean the area. You will then be given medicine to numb the skin. All or part of the tumor will be removed from the skin. After the biopsy, you will need stitches and a bandage to close the wound. The tissue sample is then sent to a lab for test.
- **Chemotherapy:** This medicine, often called chemo, is used to treat cancer. It works by killing tumor cells. Chemotherapy may also be used to shrink lymph nodes that have cancer in them. Once the tumor is smaller, you may need surgery to remove the rest of the cancer.
  - Many different chemotherapy medicines are used to treat cancer. You may need blood tests often. The blood tests show how your body is doing and how much chemotherapy is needed. Chemotherapy can have many side effects. Caregivers will watch you closely and work with you to decrease side effects. Chemotherapy can cure some cancers. Even if the chemotherapy does not cure your cancer, it may help you feel better and live longer.
- **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. Lymph nodes with cancer are also treated with radiation. In some cancers, radiation may be given after surgery to kill cancer cells that were not removed. It may also be given with chemotherapy. Radiation may help decrease pain, control bleeding and shrink the tumor.
- **Skin grafting:** A skin graft is a thin piece of healthy skin that is removed from another part of the body. The healthy piece of skin is then put onto an injured part of the body. When a large or deep tumor is removed from the skin, a large wound and scar may occur. A skin graft can help close the wound or decrease the amount of scarring.
- **Surgery:** The tumor (lump or bump) is removed by cutting it out of the skin. Surgery may also be done if the cancer has spread into the lymph nodes or other parts of the body.

