

Skin Cancer

SIMMONS CANCER INSTITUTE
AT SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY



What Is Skin Cancer?

There are three types of skin cancer. Basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma are referred to as nonmelanoma skin cancer. Melanoma is the third type. Squamous cells form the outer layer of skin and basal cells are found beneath the squamous cells. Melanoma develops from melanocytes.

Basal Cell Carcinoma and Squamous Cell Carcinoma

Approximately 1 million cases of nonmelanoma skin cancer will occur each year. Ninety percent of all skin cancers in the United States are basal cell carcinoma. The main cause of nonmelanoma skin cancer is from ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun or artificial sources such as sunlamps and tanning booths. Most skin cancers occur after the age of 50 as a result of cumulative UV exposure.

Melanoma

Melanoma begins in melanocytes, the cells that produce the pigment. It typically occurs in the skin, but can occur in areas where there are melanocytes such as eyes, digestive tract, and lymph nodes. The exact causes of Melanoma are unknown. Risk factors include atypical moles, many moles, fair skin, personal history of melanoma or skin cancer, family history of melanoma, weakened immune system, experiencing severe blistering sunburns, and exposure to UV radiation.

Melanoma will sometimes appear as a change in an existing mole or as a new mole. People can use the **ABCD method** when looking for changes in mole characteristics.

- A – Asymmetry**, the shape of one half does not match the other.
- B – Border**, the edges are ragged, notches, blurred, or irregular in outline or the pigment may spread into the surrounding skin.
- C – Color**, uneven color with shades of black, brown, and tan or areas of white, gray, red, pink, or blue may be visible. Occasionally, melanoma can be the same color as the rest of the skin.
- D – Diameter**, there is a change in size. Melanomas are usually larger than the eraser of a pencil, but may be smaller.

Limit Sun Exposure

Reduce exposure during peak UV times (the sun is the strongest from 11am – 3pm).

Wear Protective Clothing

Wear clothes that cover the skin such as long sleeves and a hat.

Use Sunscreen

Use a minimum of an SPF 15. SPF is sun protection factor. The number indicates the protection factor. For example, if you normally burn in 10 minutes while unprotected, an SPF will protect 15 times that or 150 minutes. The higher the SPF number, the higher the protective factor. Follow directions when using sunscreen. Apply liberally and prior to going out into the sun. You may need to reapply sunscreen after swimming, sweating, and as recommended in the directions. Sunscreen should never be used on infants six months and younger.

Don't Use Artificial Sun Sources

Avoid using tanning booths and sunlamps. They produce UV radiation.

Remember, a tan is a sign of skin damage. No tan is a safe tan.

For more information about the Simmons Cancer Institute at SIU or any of our programs, *contact us at 217-545-6818 or visit us at www.siumed.edulcancer.*

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