

Skin Cancer

Peggy M. grew up in the sunshine, and always had a nice tan. Now, at 66, she is bothered by several rough, bumpy areas on the backs of her hands. One of them seems to be growing and bled when she bumped it.

What Is Skin Cancer? Our skin protects us against the environment and all the things in it that might do us harm. It renews itself throughout our lives. But injury, particularly injury from the sun, can upset this repair process and can produce skin cancer.

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer. Nearly half of all those who live to age 65 will develop at least one skin cancer.

Skin cancer is nearly always curable if found early. You should take an interest in your skin and how you can help prevent and detect skin cancer.

What Types of Skin Cancer Are There? Skin cancer can be non-melanoma or melanoma. The term “melanoma” refers to a cancer of the cells that give skin its color. There are two non-melanoma cancers, basal cell and squamous cell.

These cancers:

- Occur on areas of the skin exposed to the sun.
- Are cured with fairly minor surgery.
- Usually do not spread unless they are ignored.

Melanoma resembles moles and can be found on any skin area. This cancer:

- Is more dangerous than other skin cancers because it invades and destroys nearby tissue.
- Is easily cured if found in the early stages.

What Do I Look For? You should check your skin once a month. Use a hand mirror for areas that are hard to see. If you have any worries about changes in your skin, see your doctor or a dermatologist.

Squamous Cell Cancer

Look for the following:

- A wart-like growth that crusts and occasionally bleeds.
- A long-lasting, scaly red patch with irregular borders that sometimes crusts or

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bleeds.

- An open sore that bleeds and crusts, and does not heal.
- An elevated growth with a central depression that occasionally bleeds.
- A growth of this type that rapidly increases in size.

Basal Cell Cancer

Look for the following:

- An open sore that bleeds or remains open for 3 or more weeks.
- A reddish patch or irritated area that hurts or itches.
- A shiny bump that is pearly or clear, and is often pink, red, or white.
- A pink growth with a slightly raised edge and crusted dimple.
- A scar-like area that is white, yellow, or waxy.

Melanomas

Melanomas can be suspected by using the ABCD test on moles you may find on your body:

- **A** is for **A**symmetry (one half not the same as the other).
- **B** is for an irregular **B**order.
- **C** is for more than one **C**olor in the same mole.
- **D** is for **D**iameter (width) — larger than a pencil eraser.

See your doctor quickly if a mole is getting bigger.

How Can I Protect Myself?

Skin cancer is caused by sun exposure. Staying out of the sun, particularly from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM when sun damage is the worst, is the most important thing you can do to prevent skin cancer.

Sun-Protective Clothes

Protective clothing, such as long sleeves, hats, sunglasses, and sunscreen also help prevent skin cancer.

You can now buy special sun-protective clothing.

Sun-protective clothes look like regular clothing, so you have to check them closely to see if they will protect you from the sun. Generally, sun-protective clothes:

- Have a tighter weave or knit than traditional fabrics.

How Can I Protect

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Myself?

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- Are usually a dark color.
- Are labeled with the level of protection the clothing provides from the sun's UV (ultraviolet) rays.

Sunscreen

Using sunscreen can also help prevent skin cancer. Be sure to use sunscreen on sunny and cloudy days, but don't stay out in the sun longer just because you have it on.

Resources Organizations

Canadian Cancer Society

Web site: www.cancer.ca

Frontenac-Lennox & Addington Unit

2795 Princess St.

Woodbine Plaza

Kingston, Ontario K7P 2X1

Tel: 613 384-2361; Toll-free: 1 866 877-0309

Fax: 613 384-9783

E-mail: frontenac@ontario.cancer.ca

Hastings-Prince Edward County Unit

18 Moira St. West

Belleville, Ontario K8P 1S2

Tel: 613 962-0686; Toll free: 1 800 385-5457

Fax: 613 962-8523

E-mail: hastings@ontario.cancer.ca

Lanark, Leeds & Grenville Unit

201-105 Dufferin Street

Perth, Ontario K7H 3A5

Tel: 613 267-1058

Toll-free: 1 800 367-2913

Fax: 613 267-4517

E-mail: lanarklg@ontario.cancer.ca

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Other Canadian Dermatology Association

Organizations Web site: www.dermatology.ca

This bilingual site provides public education on all aspects of skin care including sun awareness and safety, several practical sections on sun protection, including the role of sunscreen in an overall sun protection program. Photographs of normal and atypical moles can also be found on the site.

Canadian Health Network (CHN)

Web site: www.canadian-health-network.ca

The Canadian Cancer Society provides the cancer-related content for this Health Canada website. CHN is a national, non-profit, bilingual web-based health information service. CHN's goal is to help Canadians find the information they're looking for on how to stay healthy and prevent disease. This site contains a number of resources on sun safety and skin cancer.

Canadian Ophthalmological Society

Web site: www.eyesite.ca

The public information section of this site contains facts and tips about how UV rays and commercial tanning salons could affect the eyes. Tips to help with the purchase of sunglasses are also provided.

Environment Canada's UV Index

Web site: www.msc.ec.gc.ca

This site contains information about the UV Index and the ozone layer. There are sections for student and teachers and for travellers to the USA, the Caribbean and Mexico. Links are provided to other sun protection sites.

Health Canada

Web site: www.hc-sc.gc.ca

Health Canada's Smart Summer Fun section provides information on the ozone layer, skin cancer, sunglasses and the UV Index. A search of other sections of Health Canada's site will reveal information on tanning salons and tanning under lights.

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