

## **Skin Cancer: The Pimple That Wouldn't Go Away**

I couldn't really notice it at first. But, after months of watching what I initially thought was a pimple persist, I woke up one morning with blood on my pillow. My wife insisted that I go to the Dermatologist where a biopsy was performed which later confirmed that I had a Basal Cell Carcinoma.

Skin cancer is the most common cancer and usually presents as a non-healing pimple, scaly red tender area, or as a spot that looks like an "ugly duckling" different from anything else on the body. In a population that works and plays outdoors, rates of skin cancer in Colorado are greater than ever. 1 in 5 Americans will get skin cancer during their lifetime. Early detection = early cure.

### **Most Common Types of Skin Cancer**

**Basal cell carcinoma (BCC):** The most common cancer in humans, BCC develops in more than 1 million Americans every year. BCC can take several forms. It can appear as a shiny or pearly nodule, a sore that continuously heals and then re-opens, a pink slightly elevated growth, reddish patch of skin, or a waxy scar. Most BCCs appear on skin with a history of exposure to the sun, such as the face, ears, scalp, and upper trunk. These tumors tend to grow slowly and can take years to reach ½ inch in size. While these tumors very rarely metastasize (cancer spreads to other parts of the body), dermatologists encourage early diagnosis and treatment to prevent extensive damage to surrounding tissue.

**Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC):** The 2<sup>nd</sup> most common skin cancer affecting 200,000 Americans every year. SCC tends to develop in fair-skinned individuals who have had long-term sun exposure. It most often appears as a crusted or scaly area of skin with a red inflamed base that resembles a non-healing ulcer, or crusted-over patch of skin. While most commonly found on sun-exposed areas of the body, it can develop anywhere, including the inside of the mouth and the genitalia. SCC often arise from actinic keratoses ("pre-cancers"), which are dry, scaly lesions that can be treated with liquid nitrogen cryotherapy or topical creams. SCC requires early treatment to prevent metastasis (spreading).

**Melanoma:** Melanoma has been coined "the most lethal form of skin cancer" because it can rapidly spread to the lymph system and internal organs. In the United States alone, approximately one person dies from melanoma every hour. Older Caucasian men have the highest mortality rate. Dermatologists believe this is due to the fact that they are less likely to heed the early warning signs. With early detection and proper treatment, the cure rate for melanoma is about 95%. Once its spreads, the prognosis is poor. Melanoma most often develops in a pre-existing mole or looks like a new mole, which is why it is important for people to know what their moles look like and be able to detect **changes** to existing moles and spot new moles.

Since skin cancer is so prevalent today, dermatologists also recommend that everyone learn how to recognize the signs of skin cancer, use this knowledge to perform regular examinations of their skin, and see a dermatologist annually (more frequently if at high risk) for an exam. Skin cancer is highly curable with early detection and proper treatment.

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