

# Skin Cancer: Basal Cell and Squamous Cell Carcinoma

## What are basal and squamous cell carcinoma?

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. The two most common types of skin cancer are basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma. They are often called nonmelanoma skin cancers.

More than 90 percent of all skin cancers in the United States are basal cell carcinoma. It is a slow-growing cancer that usually doesn't spread to other parts of the body. Squamous cell carcinoma is much less common and is more likely to spread.

## How do I know if I have it?

Nonmelanoma skin cancer can look different from person to person, but you may have:

- A spot or bump that is new or that changes in size, shape, or color
- A sore that doesn't heal
- A small bump or patch that is smooth, shiny, pale, or pink
- A firm red lump that bleeds or develops a crust
- A flat rough spot that is dry or scaly

These skin changes do not necessarily mean you have cancer, but you should see your doctor if you have any of them for more than two

weeks. Almost all basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma are curable if found early.

## Who gets skin cancer?

You may have a higher risk if you:

- Are older than 60 years
- Have red or blond hair, fair skin, freckles, and blue or light-colored eyes
- Have contact with a lot of natural or artificial sunlight, like with tanning beds or sun lamps
- Live in sunny climates, in the mountains, or in southern states
- Have had it before or have family members with skin cancer
- Have injured skin such as a bad scar or burn
- Have had a lot of x-rays

## How can I prevent it?

It is important to protect your skin from the sun by using sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30, by wearing a shirt or other cover-up and a hat with a large brim, and by avoiding the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the rays are the strongest. You also should not use tanning beds or sun lamps.



## Skin Cancer *(continued)*

### Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Cancer Society

Web site: <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/skincancer-basalandsquamouscell/index>

National Cancer Institute:

Web site: <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/wyntk/skin>

July 2012

**Notes:**

---

**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.**

This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject. Copyright © 2012 American Academy of Family Physicians. Individuals may photocopy this material for their own personal reference, and physicians may photocopy for use with their own patients. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.