

Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is one of the most common types of cancer. Fortunately, it also is highly preventable. Learning how to protect yourself is very important.

Types of Skin Cancer

The three most common types are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma. About 75 percent of all skin cancers are basal cell carcinomas. And, 20 percent are squamous cell carcinomas. Both types are highly curable if caught early.

Although it makes up only 4 percent of skin cancers, melanoma is the most serious form. Atypical moles often warn of melanomas. These moles usually begin as brown or black blemishes. They can bleed and have irregular borders that may turn shades of red, blue or white. Signs of melanoma can be found using the “ABCDE” rule:

- **A**symmetry. Half the mole looks different than the other half.
- **B**order. The mole has irregular, ragged edges.
- **C**olor. There are different colors in or around the mole.
- **D**iameter. The mole is greater than one-fourth inch.
- **E**levation. The mole is raised.

Risk Factors

Having too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation is one of the biggest risk factors for skin cancer. Sunlight is the main source of UV radiation. But, tanning lamps or beds also are sources. Other risk factors include:

- Fair skin
- Family history
- Increasing age

Protecting Yourself

The best way to prevent skin cancer is to avoid UV rays as much as possible. Of course, there will be times when going out in the sun is unavoidable. The following tips can help you protect yourself:

- Avoid the sun when rays are strongest, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Use sunscreen every time you go outside, even if it's a cloudy winter day. Make sure it protects against both types of UV rays, UVA and UVB. And, use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.
- Wear tightly woven clothes, a wide brimmed hat and sunglasses with UV protective lenses.
- Don't use tanning beds or lamps.

If you see any changes in your skin or to your moles, see your doctor or dermatologist. Early detection is crucial.

If you have any questions about skin cancer or any other health-related concern, call Optum®. Nurses are available 24 hours every day.

1-800-475-7923

TDD/TTY callers, please call the National Relay Center at 1-800-855-2880 and ask for the number above.