

Skin Cancer: Is It Only Skin Deep?

May 2012: National Skin Cancer Month

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. Your skin is the largest organ in your body. Knowing this, it might help you to understand the importance of recognizing and treating skin cancer in its early stages.

What are the most common types of skin cancer?

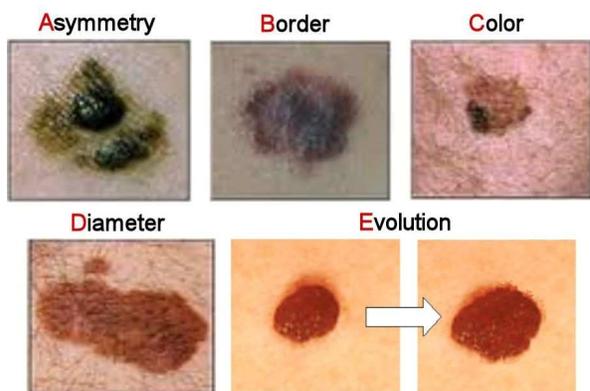
- **Squamous Cell Carcinoma**-Outer layer of the skin. If caught early, it can be treated successfully; however, if left untreated, it can spread and cause both external tissue damage and internal destruction.
- **Basal Cell Carcinoma**-This is the most common form and is slow growing. It typically affects the outer layer of skin that produces new skin cells. It is thought to be caused by overexposure to UV rays.
- **Melanoma**-It is also thought to be caused by overexposure to sunlight. It occurs in the layer of skin that produces melanin (where the skin gets its color). If undetected or untreated, melanoma can cause death.

Signs or symptoms:

- For squamous and basal cell carcinoma, look for a patch of skin or sore that will not heal or bleeds.
- Basal cell carcinoma is mostly found on sun exposed areas. It can have a white or waxy bump or a flat, scaly, brown or flesh patch.
- Squamous cell carcinoma can form anywhere on the body. It typically has the appearance of a firm, red nodule; flat, scaly lesion; or flat or raised ulceration.
- Melanoma can occur anywhere on the body. It may or may not start as a mole. Noticing changes on the skin can be the first indication of melanoma. Spreading of pigment, oozing, or itchiness can also be first signs.

Remember your A, B, C, D, + E's:

- **A-asymmetrical shape.** Look for moles with irregular shapes
- **B-borders showing irregularity.** Look for moles with irregular, notched or scalloped borders
- **C-changes in color.** Growths may have an uneven color or have many colors
- **D-diameter.** Look for growth in a mole, larger than about 1/4 inch (6 millimeters or size of an end of an eraser).
- **E-evolving.** Look for changes over time, for example if it grows in size, changes shape or color, or bleeds or itchiness.



Risk factors:

- **Fair skin**
- **History of severe burns**
- **Over exposure to UV rays**
- **Many or unusual moles**
- **Family history and age**

Prevention:

- **Avoid prime sunlight hours**
- **Wear sunscreen year round**
- **Be aware of reflective surfaces ex: sand, water, snow**
- **Self-checks**
- **Check medications**-some can make your skin more sensitive to sunlight
- **Avoid tanning beds**
- **Wear protective clothing**
- **Get regular "skin" checkups with your doctor**



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Wellness 2000, Inc. 1175 E. Main Street, Suite 2F, Medford, OR 97504

• (800) 866-8344 • Fax (541) 770-7929 • www.wellness2000.com