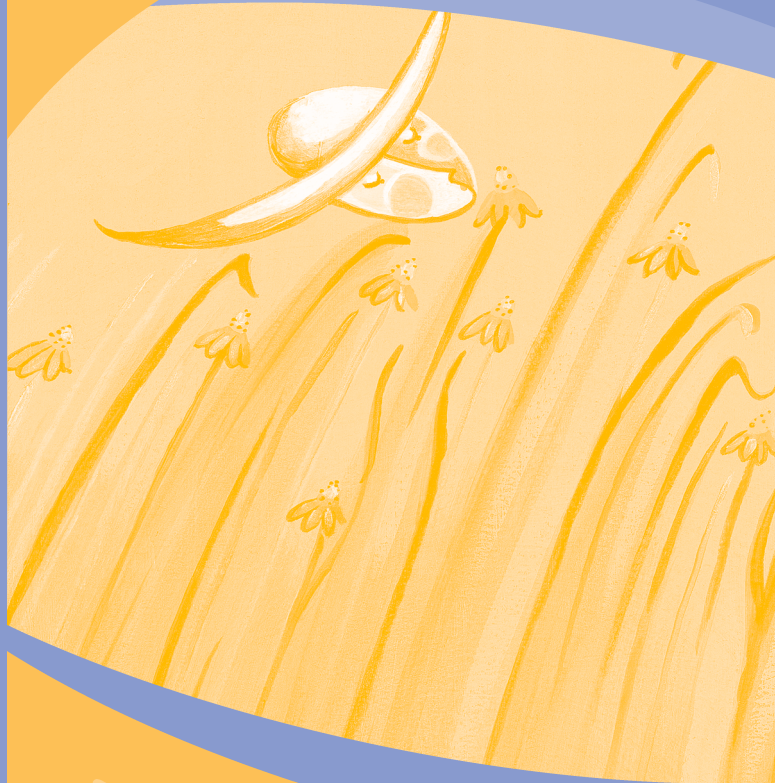


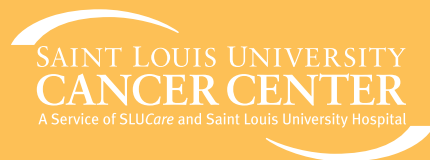
Saint Louis University Cancer Center
SKIN CANCER



Saint Louis University Cancer Center
3655 Vista Avenue
St. Louis, Missouri 63110-2539
(314) 268-7015 or (866) 977-4440

cancercenter.slu.edu
www.slucare.com
www.sluhospital.com

*What you
should know
about skin
cancer.*



SOME FACTS ABOUT SKIN CANCER

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. Each year, about one million people find out they have the disease — that's one out of every seven Americans. In 85 percent of these cases, damage to the skin that results in cancer occurs before a person reaches the age of 18. Fortunately, better methods of treating the disease mean it is now almost always curable if found early.

This brochure is designed to give you the information you need to understand and hopefully prevent the three most common types of skin cancers. Let's start by answering two basic questions.

WHAT IS CANCER?

People get cancer when, for reasons that aren't yet known, cells within their bodies divide without control or order. The body is made up of many types of cells, and it is normal for them to grow, divide and produce more cells when the body needs them. Cancer occurs when cells keep dividing, even when new cells are not needed. The mass of extra cells may produce a tumor that can be:

- benign (not cancer) — Benign tumors are rarely life-threatening, and they do not spread to other parts of the body. They often can be removed and usually do not grow back.
- malignant (cancer) — Malignant tumors can harm nearby tissues and spread to other parts of the body.

WHAT DOES THE SKIN DO?

As your body's outer covering, your skin protects you from heat and light, injury and infection. Its job is to control your body's temperature and to store water, fat and vitamin D. Your skin is your body's largest organ, and it is made up of two main layers:

- Epidermis or outer layer of skin — This layer is mostly made up of flat, scale-like squamous cells. Under these cells are round basal cells. The deepest part of the epidermis also contains melanocytes. These cells produce melanin, which gives your skin its color.

- Dermis or inner layer of skin — The dermis contains blood and lymph vessels, hair follicles and glands. The glands produce sweat, which helps regulate your body's temperature, and sebum, an oily substance that keeps your skin from drying out. Both reach your skin's surface through small openings called pores.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SKIN CANCERS

The two most common forms of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma. Carcinoma means a cancer that begins in the cells covering or lining an organ. Remember, your skin is your body's largest organ. More than 90 percent of all skin cancers found in Americans are basal cell carcinomas. This slow-growing cancer seldom spreads to other parts of the body. Squamous cell carcinoma also rarely spreads, but it does so more often than basal cell carcinoma. These cancers are sometimes called non-melanoma skin cancers. They are rarely life-threatening. However, early treatment is important, since both can destroy the tissue surrounding them.

A far more dangerous form of skin cancer is malignant melanoma. Although less common than other skin cancers, the frequency of melanoma in the United States has more than doubled in the past 20 years. Melanoma can

spread to the lymph nodes (lymph glands), which sometimes means the cancer cells have spread to other parts of the body. Melanoma is far more difficult to treat once it reaches this stage.

Melanoma begins in melanocytes. When your skin is exposed to the sun, melanocytes produce more pigment, and that's why your skin darkens or tans. While melanoma may suddenly appear in the skin with no warning, 70 percent or more begin in or near a mole or other dark spot in the skin. Moles are benign growths formed by clusters of melanocytes and surrounding tissue. They are very common. They can appear as flesh-colored, pink, tan or brown areas on the skin. Moles can be flat or raised, and they are usually round or oval with a sharply defined border.

ARE YOU AT RISK FOR DEVELOPING SKIN CANCER?

Everyone has some possibility of developing skin cancer, but some people have more risk factors. Risk factors are things that increase your chance of developing the disease. If any of the following describe your physical appearance or personal history, you should be aware that your risk for developing skin cancer is increased. Be sure to have regular check-ups and do monthly skin self-examinations. Keep in mind that not everyone at high risk develops skin cancer.

- Light or fair complexion, especially blonde, red or light-brown hair and blue, green or gray eyes. It's important to note, however, that dark-skinned people can develop melanoma, especially on their hands, soles of their feet and under their nails.
- A tendency to burn easily and to tan little or not at all.
- Long periods of daily sun exposure, especially during childhood.
- A history of bad sunburns or scars from previous burns.
- A previous history of skin cancer.
- A family history of skin cancer, especially malignant melanoma.
- Many ordinary moles (more than 50).
- A history of atypical nevi (abnormal moles).
- Undergoing immunosuppressive therapy.
- Taking medications that interact with light to cause chemical reactions or increase the skin's sensitivity to sunlight. Check with your doctor or pharmacist to find out if any medications you are using increase your risk for sunburn.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT SKIN CANCER

No matter what your skin type, it's a good idea to take precautions against too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun, the main cause of skin cancer. Research indicates that about 80 percent of skin cancers could be prevented by using protection from the sun's rays.

It is especially important to make sure children are protected. Today they may have a painful, blistering sunburn; later in life they may have skin cancer.

- Limit your sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun's rays are generally strongest. Remember that UV rays reflect off water, sand, snow and any light-colored surface, like concrete, and that they reach below the water's surface. Cloudy, gray days also call for sun protection, since the sun's rays are still present.
- Cover up with hats that shade your face, neck and ears, and with shirts and slacks made of tightly woven fabrics.
- Use sunscreens every day on skin not covered by clothing or a hat. Some things to keep in mind:
 - Your sunscreen should have a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15. Use one that protects against UVA and UVB rays. Choose one that is PABA free and water proof. Apply it liberally (about an ounce for an adult) 30 minutes before exposure; then reapply every 90 minutes. It's a good idea to apply a test dose to check for allergic reactions.
 - Zinc oxide, or "titanium dioxide" physical blockers, can be applied to sensitive areas like the nose, ears, cheeks and shoulders.
 - Do not use chemical sunscreens on children under six months of age. Keep them covered and in the shade. Zinc oxide can be used.

- Avoid using sunlamps or tanning parlors. There is no such thing as a safe tan or “good rays.” Tanned skin means damaged and injured skin, whether the rays come from the sun or from an artificial source.

EARLY DETECTION OF SKIN CANCER

If all skin cancers were caught before they had a chance to spread, the cure rate for this disease could be 100 percent. So it’s important that you know the signs and symptoms of skin cancer and report them to your doctor right away. **The most common warning sign of skin cancer is a change on the skin.** Look for the following symptoms in a mole, birthmark, scar or freckle:

- A change in color or the appearance of two or more colors (colors can be black, brown, red, grey or white).
- A change in shape or an irregularly shaped mole.
- A change in the surface, including scales, nodules or lumps.
- A change in size or a mole bigger than the size of a pencil eraser.
- A change in the borders or irregular, faded borders.
- A persistent lump or swelling.
- A new mole.
- A sore that does not heal or begins to bleed.

Keep in mind that not all cancers look alike. Some start as small, smooth, shiny, pale or waxy lumps; some are firm red lumps. Sometimes the

lumps bleed or develop a crust. Skin cancer can also start as a flat, red spot that is rough, dry or scaly.

PERFORM A SKIN SELF-EXAM MONTHLY

Improve your chances of finding skin cancer promptly by performing a monthly skin self-examination. The best time to do an exam is after a bath or shower. Choose one day a month and always do the exam on that day. Use a full-length mirror and a hand mirror so that you can check all areas of your body. Contact your doctor right away if you see any changes.

Begin by learning where your birthmarks, moles and blemishes are and what they usually look like. Then check for anything new — a change in the size, texture or color of a mole, or a sore that does not heal. Follow this exam routine to make sure you check your entire body.

1. Hold your hands with your palms facing up. Look at your palms, fingers, spaces between the fingers and forearms. Turn your hands over and examine the backs of your hands, fingers, spaces between the fingers, fingernails and forearms.
2. Stand in front of a full-length mirror and hold your arms up, bending them at the elbows with your palms facing you. Look at the backs of your forearms and elbows.

3. Still looking into the mirror, observe the entire front of your body with your palms facing the mirror. Carefully examine your face, neck, upper arms, chest, abdomen, pubic area, thighs and lower legs.
4. Continue standing in front of the mirror and lift your arms over your head with the palms facing each other. Turn so that your right side is facing the mirror; look at the entire side of your body. Turn and repeat the process with your left side.
5. With your back to the mirror, look at your buttocks, the backs of your thighs and lower legs.
6. Keep your back to the full-length mirror and use a hand mirror to examine the back of your neck and back. Also examine the back of your arms.
7. Stay in the same position and examine your scalp. Pay close attention to the hairline.
8. Sit down and prop one leg up on a chair. Use the hand mirror to examine the inside of the propped-up leg, beginning at the groin and moving the mirror down the leg to your foot. Repeat the procedure with the other leg and foot.
9. Remain seated and cross one leg over the other. Use the hand mirror to examine the top of your foot, your toes, toenails and spaces between the toes. Be sure to look at the sole of your foot. Repeat with the other foot.
10. It is often helpful to ask a family member or friend to help check difficult to see areas such as your back.

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY CANCER CENTER

Our standing as an academic medical center puts it at the forefront in developing and providing the latest medical treatment and procedures for cancer patients. For more information on the programs available through the Saint Louis University Cancer Center, call (314) 268-7015 or toll-free (866) 977-4440. Or visit the GrandVision Cancer Information Center located on the first floor of the Cancer Center.