

Skin cancer awareness

WHAT IS SKIN CANCER

This type of cancer develops in one of the tissues in the skin. When caught early, most instances are considered minor problems and are easily removed. However, if left unresolved, they can lead to a fatal disease.

Regular annual checkups are encouraged by the American Geriatrics Society. They report that more than 2 million cases of skin cancer are discovered annually in the United States.

There are three common types that experts look for during examinations.

- **Basal cell carcinoma:** The most common type in the country, starts in the outer layer of the skin and slowly grows in its original location without spreading;

- **Squamous cell cancer:** Developed from flat squamous surfaces on the skin, it is commonly caused by exposure from the sun. It's more likely to spread than basal cell but chances are still relatively low; and

- **Melanoma:** This is the most dangerous form of skin cancer, which often spreads to important parts of the body. It occurs by affecting specialized cells in the skin that produce melanin. If caught early, 97 percent of melanomas can be cured, but it becomes more difficult to treat in later stages.

PROTECTING YOURSELF

The most important thing to do to lessen the risk of skin cancer is to avoid staying out in the sun. When going outdoors, wear long-sleeved shirts and pants when temperatures permit. During sunny days, make sure to liberally apply sunscreen with a UPF of 30 or higher on exposed skin.

Don't forget to reapply sunscreen after every few hours if you will be outside for long durations.

TREATMENTS

If you find yourself diagnosed with skin cancer, a specialist may offer different treatment methods based on its severity.

Sometimes surgical extraction can be performed to easily remove the growth. For early cases, an incision usually eradicates the disease. However, for more advanced stages, extensive surgery may be required to eliminate deeper lesions.

Serious cases which have spread may require chemotherapy and radiation to shrink or eliminate the cancer.

The Skin Cancer Foundation reports the odds of developing skin cancer rise as you age. In fact, about 50 percent of Americans who live to age 65 will have experienced at least one type of skin disease. Before enjoying the summer outdoors, don't skimp on the sunscreen.

