



“I know I should use sunscreen to help prevent skin cancer. What else can I do?”

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States. It is also one of the most curable cancers when it is caught and treated early.



Skin cancer is the abnormal growth of skin cells. It develops most often from excessive exposure to the sun and its ultraviolet (UV) rays, but can also occur on areas of your skin not exposed to sunlight.

Anyone can get skin cancer

If you have a personal or family history of skin cancer, your risk of reoccurring or developing skin cancer may be greater than if you had no family history of it.

Certain physical characteristics are associated with a greater risk of developing skin cancer:

- Lighter natural skin color or skin that burns, freckles or reddens easily
- Blue or green eyes
- Red or blond hair
- Several large or many small moles

Some people’s skin will get tan when exposed to sun for prolonged periods of time. Skin cells signal that they have been hurt by UV rays by producing more pigment. Any change in skin color after UV exposure, whether it is a tan or a burn, is your skin’s response to injury. Every time you tan, you increase your risk of getting skin cancer.

Types of skin cancer

Basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma are the most common types of skin cancer. They occur most often in areas of the skin exposed to the most sun, such as nose, ears, lips, or tops of hands. Common signs of these types of skin cancer may include:

- A sore that does not heal
- Areas of the skin that are raised, smooth, shiny and look pearly
- Areas that are firm and look like a scar
- Areas that are raised and red or reddish-brown
- Areas that are scaly, bleed or are crusty

Melanoma is much less common than the other types, but much more likely to invade nearby tissue and spread to other parts of the body. Most deaths from skin cancer are caused by melanoma. A simple way to remember the signs of melanoma is to remember the A-B-C-D-Es of melanoma:

"A"	Does the mole or spot have an irregular shape with two parts that look very different?
asymmetrical	
"B"	Is the border irregular or jagged?
border	
"C"	Is the color uneven?
color	
"D"	Is the mole or spot larger than the size of a pea?
diameter	
"E"	Has the mole or spot changed during the past few weeks or months?
evolving	

Protect the skin you're in!

UV rays from sunlight are the greatest during the late spring and early summer in North America, but protection is important all year round. UV rays from the sun can reach you on cloudy and hazy days, as well as bright and sunny days. They also reflect off surfaces like water, cement, sand and snow.

- Stay in the shade, especially during midday hours. The hours between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. are the most hazardous for UV exposure.
- Wear clothing that covers your arms and legs.
- Wear a hat with a wide brim to shade your face, head, ears and neck.
- Wear sunglasses that wrap around and block both UVA and UVB rays.
- Use sunscreen and lip balm with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher, and both UVA and UVB (broad spectrum) protection. Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going in the sun, and reapply it every two hours and after swimming, exercising or sweating.
- Avoid sunbathing and indoor tanning.

One of the most important things you can do is to examine your skin often for new growths or any changes in existing moles, freckles, bumps and birthmarks. A change in your skin is the most common sign of skin cancer. Report any changes in your skin to your provider.

For more information about skin cancer, visit fallonhealth.org, click on Healthwise® Knowledgebase under Quick links and search "skin cancer".

