

# THREE SKIN CANCERS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

BY DR. WILLIAM C. MAJOR, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the U.S., with more than 3.5 million skin cancers diagnosed annually. Each year there are more new skin cancer cases than all other cancers combined. One in five Americans will develop skin cancers in their lifetime, and 45 percent of Americans who live to age 65 will have skin cancer at least once.

## BASAL CELL SKIN CANCER

With an estimated 2.8 million cases diagnosed annually in the U.S., basal cell skin cancer is the most common type of skin cancer. It appears as a raised soft lump or red patch on sun-exposed areas of the body, most often on the head and neck and less often on arms and legs. Basal cell skin cancer is a slow-growing cancer that very rarely spreads to other areas of the body, but if left untreated can extend and invade deep below the skin, causing local damage and scarring.

## SQUAMOUS CELL SKIN CANCER

The second most common skin cancer, squamous cell, may take the form of a firm bump or a scaly, red patch. About 700,000 cases are diagnosed annually in the U.S. It appears most commonly on the top of the ear, the lower lip, face, neck

and head, as well as on the hands, arms and legs and is more aggressive than basal cell skin cancer. Besides causing local damage, it can spread to other areas of the body, but this is infrequent.

## MELANOMA

Melanoma accounts for only about 3 percent of all skin cancers, but causes 75 percent of all skin cancer deaths. About 125,000 new cases of melanoma are diagnosed annually in the U.S., causing nearly 8,800 deaths. It often occurs at a younger age than other skin cancers and is the most common type of cancer in young adults age 20 to 29. Melanoma develops on sun-exposed areas of the skin as well as in the eye, inside the mouth, and on the palms and soles of the feet and usually begins in a skin mole. A change in an existing mole is the most common sign of early melanoma, and the average person has about 30 moles. Risk factors include fair skin, a history of sunburns, family history of melanoma or having more than 50 moles on your body.

## LOWER YOUR RISK OF SKIN CANCER

The best way to prevent skin cancer is to limit sun exposure, especially if fair-

skinned. Even though most skin cancers appear later in life, you get about half your lifetime sun exposure before age 40. Start protecting yourself from skin cancer now by using sunscreen of at least 30 SPF that blocks both UVA and UVB rays. Wear protective clothing and put on a wide-brimmed hat in the sun. Avoid tanning beds, which substantially increase your risk of all types of skin cancer, particularly melanoma. One or more blistering sunburns in childhood or adolescence or five blistering sunburns at any age doubles the risk of melanoma.

The key to surviving skin cancer is early diagnosis through regular self-examination and visits to your doctor. The survival rate for melanoma is 99 percent if diagnosed and treated before it penetrates below the outer layer of the skin.

## TREATMENT

Most skin cancers, if diagnosed early, can be treated by local excision as a minor office procedure with good cosmetic results. Late diagnosis of larger lesions or in areas difficult to close may require more extensive surgery, such as skin grafting. Any suspicious areas of concern should be examined as soon as possible.

**THE ABCDE'S OF MELANOMA** provide guidelines to determine whether or not you should worry about a mole. They are:

	<b>A</b> Asymmetry	<b>B</b> Border CHANGE	<b>C</b> Color CHANGE (darker)	<b>D</b> Diameter CHANGE	<b>E</b> Evolutions (any change that makes one mole look different than others)
<b>BENIGN</b>					
<b>MALIGNANT</b>					

Pictures provided by The Skin Cancer Foundation. For more information, go to [www.SkinCancer.org](http://www.SkinCancer.org).