



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SKIN CANCERS

Two types of cancers account for over 95% of skin cancers around the eyes: basal cell carcinomas and squamous cell carcinomas. There are good (less aggressive) and bad (more aggressive, invasive) variants of both of these cancers. The good news is that for the vast majority of all of these cancers, early and meticulous treatment is successful in eradicating the disease.

Skin cancer removal can be accomplished by microscopic assisted technique called Mohs'. Mohs' surgeons remove cancers in thin slices and examine each slice under the microscope. This has two advantages. First, only diseased tissue is removed. Second, there is maximum confidence that the cancer has been totally resected (approximately 8-10% safer than having removal with the traditional "frozen section" technique).

Following Mohs' resection, a reconstructive surgeon repairs the operated area, attempting to maximize both cosmetic appearance and normal tissue function. The major advantage to having separate Mohs' and reconstructive surgeons is that you have physicians who are subspecialists with the greatest experience in each phase of your care.

Once you have had a skin carcinoma removed from your face, you should have regular examinations by your dermatologist, primary care doctor, or ophthalmologist. If you have had one skin cancer, there is a 30% chance that you will develop another. In people who have more than one such cancer, the average number of skin cancers that they develop over time is four.

Exposure to harmful irradiation from the sun is the major risk factor for skin cancer development. Sporadic, intense sun exposure can be more harmful than consistent, intermediate exposures. Even on cloudy days, the harmful effects of the sun should not be underestimated. The sun's rays are most dangerous between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. It is almost never too late in life to start avoiding solar damage.

Some specific recommendations:

1. Apply a good sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15-30 or higher to the face and below the eyelids daily. Sunscreen above the eyelids or on the forehead may cause eye irritation with perspiration; therefore, apply lightly in these areas.
2. Replace the sunscreen during the day, if you are in the water or strenuously exercising.
3. When outdoors, wear a wide-brimmed hat with a dark, nonreflective cloth surface beneath the brim to minimize reflective rays.
4. Wear wraparound sunglasses with 100% UV blockage to protect the eyelids from lateral rays.
5. Perform self-examinations in the mirror and bring any new lumps, bumps, and non-healing or tender areas to your physician's attention.
6. Help prevent skin cancers in others by sharing these tips with your family and friends.