



### HOW CAN I TELL IF I HAVE SKIN CANCER?

It is very important to spot skin cancer before it advances too far. Self-examination of the skin at least every 3 months is the best way to detect the early warning signs of basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and malignant melanoma.

- Use a bright light, a full-length mirror, a hand mirror, two chairs or stools and a blow dryer. Examine the head and face, using one or both mirrors and use the blow dryer to look at the scalp.
- Check the hands, including nails. In the full length mirror examine the elbows, arms and underarms. Women should check under their breasts. With back to the mirror, use the hand mirror to inspect the back of the neck, shoulders, upper arms, back, buttocks and legs. Check legs and feet, soles, heels and nails. Use the hand mirror to check genitals.

### PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY FROM THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF THE SUN!

- Do not sunbathe
- Avoid unnecessary sun exposure, especially between 10 am and 4 pm
- Use sunscreens that are rated SPF 15 or higher - apply them liberally, evenly and frequently. It should take 2 tablespoons or 1 ounce to cover your entire body (your PROfile Pharmacist can help you choose the sunscreen that best suits your particular needs)
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours, after strenuous activities and after you have been in the water
- Let the sunscreen dry on your skin for 20 to 30 minutes before going outside
- Wear protective clothing such as long pants, long-sleeved shirts and UV protective glasses when exposed to the sun
- Children should wear sunglasses too, starting as early as age one
- Avoid reflective surfaces (e.g. sand, water)
- Do not use artificial tanning devices



### WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

#### Canadian Cancer Society

National Office:  
10 Alcorn Ave., Suite 200  
Toronto, Ontario M4V 3B1  
Phone: 416-961-7223  
e-mail: [ccs@cancer.ca](mailto:ccs@cancer.ca)  
[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca) (local branches listed)

#### The Skin Cancer Foundation

245 5th Ave., Suite 1403  
New York, New York USA 10016  
Phone: 1-800-SKIN-490  
e-mail: [info@skincancer.org](mailto:info@skincancer.org)  
[www.skincancer.org](http://www.skincancer.org)

#### National Cancer Institute

[www.cancer.gov/](http://www.cancer.gov/)

#### Oncology Channel

[www.oncologychannel.com](http://www.oncologychannel.com)

#### American Cancer Society

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

The information found in this PROfile health brochure is of a general nature only. It is not intended to replace the advice of your pharmacist, physician, or other healthcare provider. If you have questions relating to your specific health concerns, please contact your personal healthcare provider.



Your PROfile Pharmacist has many resources to help you understand and prevent skin cancer and is always available to discuss your health concerns!

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# Skin Cancer

# PROfile



## WHAT IS SKIN CANCER?

Cancer occurs when, for an unknown reason, cells divide without control or order to eventually create a tumor. There are different types of skin cancer. One is called melanoma because it starts in the melanocytes (the cells that give skin its colour). Other skin cancers are called non-melanoma and start either in the outermost layer or epidermis of the skin (squamous cell cancer) or deeper in the epidermis (basal cell cancer). Non-melanoma skin cancers are the most common and can usually be treated very successfully. Melanomas start off as a mole. Although most moles are benign, some may go on to become malignant.

## WHAT INCREASES THE RISK OF SKIN CANCER?

- The risk for all kinds of skin cancers is increased by excessive exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays
- People with fair or freckled complexion are at increased risk for all types of skin cancer
- People who were sunburned as a child are at increased risk for all types of skin cancer
- People with a lot of moles or a family history of melanoma are at increased risk for melanoma
- People with a history of immune disorders, severe skin damage, history of non-cancerous growths on the skin, and workplace exposure to substances such as petroleum products and arsenic are at increased risk for non-melanoma type skin cancers

## QUESTIONS FOR THE DOCTOR

*Often it is difficult to know what to ask the doctor. Some questions you might want to ask are listed below:*

- What is the exact type of cancer I have?
- Has my cancer spread to lymph nodes or organs?
- What stage is my cancer at? What does that mean?
- What treatment choices do I have? What do you recommend and why?
- What are the chances of my cancer coming back?
- How long will each course of treatment last?
- Should I follow a special diet?

## WHAT DOES MALIGNANT MELANOMA LOOK LIKE?

There are four main types of melanoma, named depending on their location, shape and whether they grow outward or downward into the skin.

**Superficial, spreading or flat melanoma** grows outwards at first to form an irregular pattern on the skin with an uneven colour.

**Nodular melanoma** is lumpy and often blue-black in colour. It may grow quickly and spread downwards.

**Acral melanomas** occur on the palms of the hand, soles of the feet or the nail beds.

**Lentigo maligna** usually occurs on the faces of older people.

## WHAT ABOUT BASAL CELL CARCINOMA?

Basal cell carcinoma is the most common type of skin cancer. There are 5 warning signs of basal cell carcinoma:

- An open sore that bleeds, oozes, or crusts and remains open for 3 or more weeks
- A reddish patch or irritated area frequently occurring on the chest, shoulders, arms or legs
- A shiny bump or nodule that is pearly or translucent and is often pink, red, or white
- A pink growth with a slightly elevated rolled border and a crusted indentation in the centre; as the growth slowly enlarges, tiny blood vessels may develop on the surface
- A scar-like area, which is white, yellow or waxy, and often has poorly defined borders - the skin appears shiny and taut



There are three main types of standard treatment for skin cancer.

**Surgery** - Removal of part of or the entire tumour and some surrounding tissue may be accomplished with an operation. Many surgical techniques are used to remove skin cancer. They include:

- **Electrosurgery** (use of an electric current)
- **Cryosurgery** (cancer cells are frozen with liquid nitrogen)
- **Laser surgery** (cancer cells are killed with a high energy light), and
- **Micrographic surgery** (the tumor is removed layer by layer until all cancerous tissue is gone)

If a large amount of skin is removed, a skin graft may be required.

**Radiation Therapy** - This technique involves the use of x-rays or other types of radiation to kill cancer cells. The beam of radiation is carefully targeted to the affected tissue, but some damage to healthy tissue may occur. Radiation therapy is not often used in the treatment of malignant melanoma.

**Chemotherapy** - Certain drugs can kill cancer cells. Some chemotherapy drugs are taken by mouth or injected and others can be applied directly to the skin.

Because drugs that kill cancer cells can kill normal cells as well, many have unpleasant side effects. Drugs that are taken by mouth or injected can cause side effects such as nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, hair loss, tiredness and an increased risk of infections. Prevention of stomach-related side effects can often be accomplished with the use of medications such as anti-nauseants.