

Circle Of LifeSM: Cancer Education and Wellness for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities



American Cancer Society Circle Of LifeSM
Cancer Education and Wellness for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

Wellness Along the Cancer Journey:
Cancer Types
Revised October 2015
Chapter 7: Skin Cancer



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Skin Cancer

Group Discussion		True	False	Not Sure
1.	People with darker skin are not diagnosed with skin cancer.			
2.	Tanning beds do not increase the risk of developing skin cancer.			
3.	Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer.			

There are two main types of skin cancer: melanoma and all the other types (non-melanoma).

Melanoma is the more serious form of skin cancer. It can spread quickly and be hard to treat. More than 70,000 melanoma cases are diagnosed each year. Melanoma is found more often in people with fair skin but it is found in people with darker skin too. The rates of melanoma have been increasing for the last 30 years.

Basal and squamous cell carcinoma are the most common forms of skin cancer. More than 3.5 million people are found to have basal or squamous cell cancer each year. These skin cancers are very curable.

Risk Factors

A risk factor is anything that affects a person’s chance of getting a disease such as cancer. Different cancers have different risk factors. But risk factors don't tell us everything. Many people with one or more risk factors never get cancer, while others with cancer may have had no known risk factors.

Risk Factors A Person Cannot Change	Risk Factors A Person May be able to Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having skin cancer in the family. • Having had skin cancer in the past. • People who have had radiation treatment have a higher risk of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light is the biggest risk factor for skin cancers. While the main source of UV light is sunlight,

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<p>developing skin cancer in the area that received the treatment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having fair skin and moles. • Older age – older people are more likely to have skin cancers. • Having a weakened immune system. • Scientists have found that certain people are more likely to get skin cancer than others after spending time in the sun. In these people, the DNA is more sensitive to being damaged by sunlight. • Psoralen and ultraviolet light treatments (PUVA) given to some people to treat psoriasis (a lifelong skin disease) 	<p>tanning lamps and booths also give off UV light.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having HPV infection may raise the risk of skin cancer in the genital area. • Having sunburns as a child or even as an adult. • People who smoke are more likely to develop squamous cell skin cancer, especially on the lips. • Exposure to large amounts of arsenic (a heavy metal found in some well water and in some pesticides) • Workers exposed to jobs that use or process tar, coal, paraffin, and certain types of oil*
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Early Detection

Skin cancers can be found early. As part of a check-up, a health care provider might look at a person’s skin carefully. A person can also check their own skin once a month, including the palms, soles of feet, scalp, ears, back, and nails. This is best done in front of a full-length mirror. A hand-held mirror is used to look at places that are hard to see. A person should know the pattern of moles, freckles, and other marks on their skin so that they'll notice any changes. Be sure to show a health care provider any area of concern.

Friends and family members can also help by telling one another about abnormal-looking areas of skin. The key warning signs are:

- Any new growth. These can be pink, reddish, pale, or scar-like.
- A spot or bump that's getting larger. It can be flat or raised. It can look rough or scaly, or even wart-like.

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- A sore that does not heal within three months.

If a person or their health care provider finds something that doesn't look normal, tests may be used to find out if it is cancer or something else. If it is skin cancer, more tests may be done to find out if it has spread to other places.

The ABCDE Rule for Melanoma

The above methods can help a person find any type of skin cancer. Because melanoma is such a fast-growing cancer, there is a special rule to help find it. The ABCD rule is a guide to the common signs of melanoma. Be on the lookout. Tell a health care provider about any of the following changes to a mole or birthmark:

- **A** is for **ASYMMETRY**: One-half of a mole or birthmark does not match the other.
- **B** is for **BORDER**: The edges are irregular, ragged, notched, or blurred.
- **C** is for **COLOR**: The color is not the same all over. It may have shades of brown or black, sometimes with patches of red, white, or blue.
- **D** is for **DIAMETER**: The spot is larger than ¼ inch -- the size of a pencil eraser (6 millimeters) or is growing larger.





- **E** is for **EVOLVING**: The mole is changing in size, shape, or color.

The most important warning sign for skin cancer is a spot on the skin that is changing over a period of a month to one or two years. But it's important to tell your health care provider about any skin changes, since some melanomas don't fit the rules above.

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Activity

The ABCD rule is a helpful guide to the common signs of melanoma. On the chart below, fill in what each letter stands for related to a skin care check. After filling in the chart, list one to two risk factors that a person may be able to change to reduce their risk of skin cancer.

A		
B		
C		
D		

Risk Factors A Person May be Able to Change:

1. _____
2. _____

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Story of Hope



"Being in Maine, we always thought, skin cancer: Florida, California, Australia, but just not Maine," he said. "I think people take for granted that especially in the north, it's not something that we get. We do. I don't think any of us ever used sun block. We'd go out, get the first sunburn, everybody would be sore. We'd laugh it off, slap each other, you know, do those stupid kid things, and just think, yeah, it hurts. But we go through this every year for a few days, and then it peels and starts to tan, and then after that we were all set. You just need to keep in mind that if they get it ...before it spreads, the survival rate is around 90%. The key is to get it as soon as possible. If there's a spot that you ever have a concern about, get it looked at,"-- Mike Trafton, Melanoma Cancer Survivor

(American Cancer Society, (n.d.) *Story of Hope: It Won't Go Away so Don't Ignore it- Melanoma Teaches a Teacher a Lesson*. Retrieved October 18, 2009, from http://www.cancer.org/docroot/FPS/content/FPS_1_It_Wont_Go_Away_So_Dont_Ignore_It.asp?sitearea=NWS.)

Key Messages

- Most skin cancers can be cured if found and treated early.
- Being exposed to too much ultraviolet light (like sunlight or tanning beds) is the biggest risk factor for skin cancers.
- The most important warning sign for skin cancer is a spot on the skin that changes size, shape, or color over a month to one or two years' time.