



## Squamous Cell Carcinoma

occurs most commonly on skin that is exposed to the sun. This major type of cancer arises from the superficial layer (i.e., epithelium) of the skin and mucous membranes. If untreated, squamous cell carcinoma can penetrate and destroy underlying tissues. Even more serious, this tumor can spread in a small percentage of cases (i.e., metastasize), expanding to distant organs and causing death.

The chief cause of squamous cell carcinoma is chronic sun exposure. If you have fair skin, light hair, and blue, green, or gray eyes, you are especially vulnerable.

Yet there are also other factors that may spur development of this cancer. Some of these factors include burns, scars, exposure to radiation or chemicals, chronic inflammatory conditions and immuno suppression. And while dark-skinned people are less likely to develop it than fair-skinned individuals, because of their greater resistance to the damaging effects of sun exposure, it is important to realize that squamous cell carcinoma may also result from these other factors.

So what do you look for? Signs of squamous cell carcinoma include scaly red patches, elevated growths with central depression, wart-like growths, nodules and open sores. All of these types of lesions may also develop a crusted surface or bleed.

## Can I Avoid This Condition?

The chief cause of squamous cell carcinoma is chronic overexposure to the sun. That's why it's a good idea to avoid sunlight during the middle part of the day (10 a.m. to 3 p.m.). And it's always best to avoid the sun's damaging ultra-violet rays by wearing sunglasses with UV protection, broad-brimmed hats, and tightly woven clothing.

Furthermore, a broad-spectrum sunscreen should be applied liberally to all sun exposed skin (including the lips) on a daily basis, even cloudy days, and reapplied every 90 minutes during outdoor activities. Sunscreens should block both UVA and UVB rays and be rated SPF 15 or higher. Also, avoid tanning parlors and home tanning lights of any kind (self-tanning creams and sprays are OK).

No matter how many precautions you take, it's important to inspect your entire body regularly for any skin changes, especially those already mentioned. Finally, regularly visit your dermatologist for a skin examination.

## So What Treatment Can I Expect?

To confirm a diagnosis of squamous cell carcinoma, your dermatologist will want to perform a biopsy. A biopsy involves removing a portion of tissue, which is then examined by a dermatopathologist under a microscope. If cancer is confirmed, treatment is required. Generally, there are several ways to treat squamous cell carcinoma. Your physician's choice of therapy

will vary, depending on the tumor's size, location, depth of penetration, and type of squamous cell carcinoma encountered. The physician will also take into account the patient's age and general health. Some of the treatment options currently available to you are: topical therapy, excisional surgery, electrosurgery, radiation therapy, and Mohs' surgery (microscopically controlled surgery). Your dermatologist will discuss which of these treatment options is best suited to your situation.

## Be a Survivor Not a Statistic.

More than 250,000 new cutaneous squamous cell carcinomas are diagnosed every year in the United States. That makes it the second most common skin cancer. However, when diagnosed early and properly treated, the cure rate for squamous cell carcinoma is close to 95 percent. The odds of developing squamous cell carcinoma increase with age, and these lesions tend to occur more often in men than women. A person who has had one squamous cell carcinoma has an increased chance of developing another. Further, an individual who has previously had basal cell carcinoma has an increased chance of developing squamous cell carcinoma. So your best chances are to see your dermatologist on a regular basis.

*Want To Learn More?*

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