

Squamous Cell Carcinoma

Your dermatology biopsy that was recently examined by a pathologist has been diagnosed as a *squamous cell carcinoma*, a non-melanoma type of cancer.

Some Facts about Skin Cancer

There are two categories of skin cancers: melanoma and *non-melanoma*. A melanoma is a cancer that originates in the *melanocytes* – those are cells that produce the pigment *melanin* that cause skin to tan, and causes freckles or moles to develop. This type of cancer has a higher risk of spreading to other parts of the body. Non-melanoma is skin cancer that forms in the epidermis layers (skin surface), and these can be either *basal cell* or *squamous cell* carcinomas. These non-melanomas are very common, typically slow growing, and are usually cured when treated early. Each year, almost 3 million Americans are diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer.

Understanding Your Skin

The skin is the largest organ in your body that works hard making millions of new cells every day. Skin helps control body temperature and keeps you from losing fluid. It protects you from microorganisms and has sensitive nerve endings that allow us to sense the outside world by touching. And we have a lot of it, from 12 to 20 square feet!

Your skin is multi-layered and the top protective layer, the epidermis, is comprised of several layers of flat cells called *squamous* cells. When skin cancer forms in this layer, it is called squamous cell carcinoma.

Who gets squamous cell carcinoma?

Squamous cell carcinoma generally (but not always) occurs due to sunlight or ultraviolet radiation. It appears most often on the neck, ears, face, back and head. People with light-colored eyes and hair have the highest risk. Darker-skinned people have less risk, but they can still get skin cancer and should use preventive protection. This condition can also develop in scars, or skin injuries such as burns or chemical exposure, persistent sores and

ulcers. People with organ transplant, receiving chemotherapy, or have other immune system conditions can also be at higher risk. Smoking is also known to increase risk. Squamous cell carcinoma is usually diagnosed in older adults (ages 40+), and twice as frequently in men versus women.

How do skin cells become cancers?

Sun exposure can cause certain chemical changes that damage the DNA of your skin cells and alters cell instructions of how to reproduce themselves. So then instead of dying off, those affected cells continue to reproduce, but they don't make normal cells, they make more damaged cells – *cancer cells* – and these appear as a growth on your skin. Pathologists can confirm this abnormal cell growth by looking at a tissue sample under a microscope.

Taking the Next Step – Treatments and Preventions

While these skin cancers typically grow very slowly, they are most often cured when treated early. Surgical removal techniques are done right in your doctor's office. Since squamous cell cancers are known to recur, it's important to monitor your skin for any changes and to see your doctor regularly.

Follow these guides for *prevention*:

- Wear protective clothing and a hat outdoors,
- Always wear UVA/UVB sunscreen,
- Minimize sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.,
- If you notice *any* new changes on your skin, contact your doctor immediately.

Learn More and Stay Informed

These trusted resources can provide more information.

<http://www.skincancer.org>

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/skincancerandmelanoma/htm/_no_50_no_0.htm

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000829.htm>

Your skin is continuously renewing itself, making millions of new cells daily. Damage by sun exposure can cause squamous cell skin cancer to develop.

This material is intended for patient education and information only. It does not constitute advice, nor should it be taken to suggest or replace professional medical care from your physician.

Your treatment options may vary, depending upon medical history and current condition. Only your physician and you can determine your best option.

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