

Skin Cancer Among People of Color

Skin cancer accounts for almost half of all cancer cases in the U.S. People of all skin tones are at risk of developing this type of cancer. However, people of color have poorer health outcomes compared to white people. Learning about the types of skin cancer and the signs and symptoms to look for can help you and your health care team catch the disease early, when it is easier to treat. This resource aims to provide an overview about skin cancer, the risks, and address common myths around this cancer.

WHAT IS SKIN CANCER?

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the U.S. It often begins as an unusual, uncontrolled growth on the skin. The different skin cancers are usually named



after the type of cell that is affected. The most common types include:

Basal Cell Carcinoma

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC) is the most common type of skin cancer. It starts in the basal, or lowest, layer of the epidermis. The epidermis is the outer layer of skin on the body that you can see and touch. BCC is often removed and treated, but sometimes it can grow back. For people of color, BCC may appear as a dark colored bump, whereas in people with lighter skin tones, it may appear more translucent.

Squamous Cell Carcinoma

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) is the second most common type of skin cancer behind basal cell carcinoma. SCC starts in the epidermis from the flat squamous cells that lie on top of the basal layer of the skin. Squamous cell carcinoma may look like a firm red bump, a scaly red patch, an open sore, or a wart that may crust or bleed easily.

Merkel Cell Carcinoma

Merkel cell carcinoma (MCC) is a very rare type of skin cancer. This cancer develops in the special nerve cells within the skin. MCC can grow quickly and metastasize (spread) to other parts of the body. A sign of MCC is the presence of a lump or bump on the skin that is red or violet in color. These tumors can be firm and dome-shaped or raised. They are usually painless, but they can grow fast and turn into ulcers or sores.

Melanoma

Melanoma is a type of cancer that begins in the melanocytes. These are cells that make the pigment melanin, which gives our skin its color. Melanoma can develop anywhere in the body where melanocytes are present. This includes the skin, nails, palms of the hands, soles of the feet, and eyes. Melanoma is often found when patients notice a change in their skin or during an exam with a dermatologist. Melanoma may appear as a new mole or growth on the skin.

Skin cancer can develop anywhere on the body, but it is most often found on areas often exposed to sunlight. This includes the face, neck, hands, and arms. When found early, skin cancer can be easy to treat and cure. When it spreads to other parts of the body it may no longer be curable, but it can still be treated in many cases.

Signs of skin cancer can show up differently for people of color. This can make it harder for people to notice the signs and symptoms right away. For example, signs of melanoma

in people of color may also appear under the fingernails and between the toes.

If you notice a new dark spot on your skin, anything unusual, or a sore or patch of skin that won't heal, talk with your doctor. Do monthly skin checks—check all the surfaces of your skin and look closely at your moles so that you can tell if they begin to change in shape, size, or color. It may help to take pictures of any moles or bumps you are concerned about so you can keep track of any changes.



To learn more about the types of skin cancer visit, www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Skin-Cancer.



TERMS TO KNOW

Dermatologist: This member of the health care team diagnoses and treats skin problems, including skin cancer.

Medical oncologist: This person diagnoses and treats cancer. It is important to find an oncologist who specializes in skin cancers.

Skin exam: A dermatologist will check the skin for bumps or spots that look abnormal in color, size, shape, or texture. The dermatologist should examine your entire body, not just areas that are primarily exposed to the sun.

Skin biopsy: If needed, all or part of an unusual growth or spot is cut from the skin. The sample will be looked at under a microscope to check for signs of cancer. There are different types of biopsies that may be used depending on the type of cancer and its location.

- A personal or family history of skin cancer
- Having more than 50 moles
- Possible genetic factors (for example, mutations in certain genes or family history)
- History of radiation therapy, certain conditions that suppress the immune system, and exposure to high levels of arsenic

LOWERING CANCER RISK

One of the most helpful ways a person can reduce their risk of skin cancer is to practice safe habits while out in the sun. This includes avoiding excessive direct sun exposure when possible. Staying in shaded areas when out in the sun or wearing clothing that protects your arms and legs can help.

If you are going out in the sun, wear a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (or SPF) of at least 30. Wear a hat to shade your face and ears and use sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB. It is important to avoid indoor tanning as well, which causes exposure to UV radiation.

Getting regular screenings can help. Screenings are important because they can lead to an earlier cancer diagnosis. Early detection leads to better health outcomes and chances of survival. The earlier skin cancer is diagnosed, the more likely it can be cured. Skin exams and biopsies are common screening tests used to diagnose skin cancer. These tests allow the doctor to examine any unusual spots or moles on the skin.

SKIN CANCER RISK

Risk factors are things that can increase a person's chance of developing a disease. While skin cancer is more common among people with light or fair skin tones, people with darker skin tones can still be diagnosed. There are several factors that can increase a person's risk of developing skin cancer, including:

- Exposure to excessive sunlight or ultraviolet radiation from tanning booths
- Frequent blistering sunburns, especially early in life



COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

It is important to stay in communication with your doctor before a diagnosis even occurs. If you notice anything unusual on your skin, like a sore or patch of skin that won't heal, talk with your doctor. If you are diagnosed with cancer, communicating with your health care team throughout treatment is key.

Cancer treatment can be complex. Recommended treatment options can change with new advancements. You need a health care team you can trust to work with you and give you the best care. When choosing your health care team, it is important that you can have honest and open conversations. During appointments, make sure you share your concerns, ask questions, and feel like you are being heard.

GETTING A SECOND OPINION

At any point in your care, you can ask for a second opinion. Many people with cancer get a second or even third opinion to confirm their diagnosis and review treatment options. Another hospital or doctor may offer a different treatment, including clinical trials, or more useful support services. They may be a better fit for you in other ways. **Do not worry about hurt feelings.** You can always return to the first doctor if you want. But remember that timely cancer treatment is key when deciding to seek multiple opinions.



If you are facing a cancer treatment decision, the Cancer Support Community's Open to Options program can help you prepare a list of personalized questions to share with your doctor. Our Open to Options[®] specialists can help you create a written list of specific questions about your treatment plan for your doctor. **Call 888-793-9355 to schedule an appointment or to find a Cancer Support Community near you.**



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SKIN CANCER

Skin Cancer Myths

There are many myths that you may hear about skin cancer. These can be discussed in daily life or read on the internet and social media. Here are a few common myths about skin cancer and the actual truth behind them:

1. Sun exposure is the only cause of skin cancer. FALSE!

Exposure to UV radiation through indoor tanning, exposure to chemicals like tar and arsenic, having a family history of skin cancer, and having a weakened immune system can also lead to skin cancer.

2. Sunscreen should be applied only during the summer when it is sunny. FALSE!

UV rays are present all year round. They can be just as harmful during a cloudy, winter, and/or snowy day.

3. People with darker skin tones don't get skin cancer. FALSE!

Skin cancer can develop in all skin tones. People with darker skin tones may not notice the signs right away and may be diagnosed later, which can lead to worse outcomes.

Skin Cancer & Financial Toxicity

The cost of cancer care is an issue for many people. It can add more stress to an already stressful time. Costs can be direct—bills that

result from treatment such as copays, or indirect—losing work, paying for childcare, gas money, parking for treatment. Financial toxicity, or financial distress, describes the problems that arise due to the high costs of cancer care.

Whatever your situation, there are resources and organizations that can help. Ask to sit down with the financial or insurance counselor at your cancer center. They can work with you to understand what the costs may be and develop a plan to pay for it.

For more information to help you deal with costs related to your care, visit www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Cost.

TALK TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Talk to friends, family, and your community about how you have been affected by skin cancer. Share with others about ways to stay safe in the sun and reduce exposure to UV radiation. Many people believe that skin cancer only develops in people with light or fair skin tones, but everyone is at risk.

Remember that you are not alone. It can be helpful to talk to people who have similar experiences to feel supported. Your care team may be able to share local support groups for people with skin cancer and their caregivers. Support may also be found in your religious organizations, workplaces, and other communities. Sharing your story may help others navigate their own cancer experience. It can also help others stay safe and know the signs to look out for.



SKIN CANCER RESOURCES

Melanoma Research Foundation • 800-673-1290 • www.Melanoma.org

CancerCare • 800-813-4673 • www.CancerCare.org

National Institute of Health's Clinical Trial Search • www.ClinicalTrials.gov

Skin Cancer Foundation • www.SkinCancer.org

Merkelcell.org • www.Merkelcell.org

American Academy of Dermatology Association • www.aad.org/public/diseases/skin-cancer/types

Patient Advocate Foundation • 800-532-5274 • www.PatientAdvocate.org

National Cancer Institute • 800-422-6237 • www.cancer.gov

CANCER SUPPORT COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Cancer Support Helpline[®] — Have questions, concerns or looking for resources? Call CSC's toll-free Cancer Support Helpline (888-793-9355), available in 200 languages Mon-Fri 9am-9pm ET and Sat-Sun 9am-5pm ET.

Open to Options[®] — Preparing for your next appointment? Our trained specialists can help you create a list of questions to share with your doctor. Make an appointment by calling 888-793-9355 or by contacting your local CSC or Gilda's Club.

Frankly Speaking About Cancer[®] — Trusted information for cancer patients and their loved ones is available through publications, online, and in-person programs.

Services at Local CSCs and Gilda's Clubs — With the help of 170 locations, CSC and Gilda's Club network partners provide services free of charge to people touched by cancer. Attend support groups, educational sessions, wellness programs, and more at a location near you. www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/find-location-near-you.

Cancer Experience Registry[®] — Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey at www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/registry.

MyLifeLine — CSC's private, online community allows patients and caregivers to easily connect with friends and family to receive social, emotional, and practical support throughout the cancer journey and beyond. Sign up at www.MyLifeLine.org.

Grassroots Network — Make sure your voice is heard by federal and state policy makers on issues affecting cancer patients and survivors by joining our Network at www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/become-advocate.

The Cancer Support Community and its partners provide this information as a service. This publication is not intended to take the place of medical care or the advice of your doctor. We strongly suggest consulting your doctor or other health care professionals to answer questions and learn more.

Photos are stock images posed by models.

This publication is available to download and print yourself at www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/skin-cancer.

For print copies of this publication or other information about coping with cancer, visit Orders.CancerSupportCommunity.org

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