

National Cancer Institute

*Anyone Can Get
Skin Cancer*



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
National Institutes of Health



Is it true that only people with light skin get skin cancer?

No. Anybody can get skin cancer. It's more common among people with a light (fair) skin tone, but skin cancer can affect anyone. Skin cancer can affect both men and women.

How can people with dark skin get skin cancer?

Although dark skin does not burn in the sun as easily as fair skin, everyone is at risk for skin cancer. Even people who don't burn are at risk for skin cancer.

It doesn't matter whether you consider your skin light, dark, or somewhere in between. You are at risk for skin cancer.

Being in the sun can damage your skin. Sunlight causes damage through ultraviolet, or UV rays, (they make up just one part of sunlight). Two parts of UV, UVA and UVB, can both cause damage to skin.

Also, the sun isn't the only cause of skin cancer. There are other causes. That's why skin cancer may be found in places on the body never exposed to the sun.

How can I find skin cancer early?

When skin cancer is found early, it can be treated more easily. Talk with your doctor if you see any changes on your skin that do not go away within one month.

What does skin cancer look like?

There are many different types of skin cancer (such as melanoma and basal cell skin cancer). Each type looks different.

Also, skin cancer in people with dark skin often looks different from skin cancer in people with fair skin.

A *change* on the skin is the most common sign of skin cancer. This may be any new growth on the skin, a sore that doesn't heal, or a change in an old growth.



Skin cancer can look like a thick and jagged scar.



Or it can look like a smooth, waxy bump or a firm red lump.

Check the skin on all surfaces of your body, even in your mouth.

- ❑ Watch for a new mole or other new growth on your skin.
- ❑ Check for changes in the appearance of an old growth on the skin or scar (especially a burn scar).
- ❑ Watch for a patch of skin that is a different color and becomes darker or changes color.
- ❑ Watch for a sore that does not heal – it may bleed or form a crust.
- ❑ Check your nails for a dark band. Check with your doctor if you see changes, such as if the dark band begins to spread.

How can I protect myself from skin cancer?

You can do many things to lower your chance of skin cancer:

1. **Have your doctor check your skin** if you are concerned about a change. Your doctor may take a sample of your skin to check for cancer cells.
2. **Ask your doctor** about your risk of skin cancer:
 - ❑ Some skin conditions and certain medicines (such as some antibiotics or hormones) may make your skin more sensitive to damage from the sun.



Or it can look like a dark (or black) bump. The bump may seem waxy or shiny.



Sometimes skin cancer can look like a dark patch on your palm or the bottom of your foot. Or it can look like a dark band under your nail.

If you notice a change on your skin, see your doctor. Don't wait until the change looks like the more advanced skin cancers in these photos.

- ❑ Medicines or medical conditions (such as HIV) that suppress the immune system may make you more likely to develop skin cancer.
- ❑ Having scars or skin ulcers increases your risk.
- ❑ Exposure to a high level of arsenic (a poison that is sometimes found in well water or pesticides) increases your risk.

3. Stay out of the sun as much as you can. Whenever possible, avoid exposure to the sun from 10 am to 4 pm.

If you work or play outside, then...

- ❑ Try to wear long sleeves, long pants, and a hat that shades

your face, ears, and neck with a brim all around.

- ❑ Use sunscreen with a label that says it is broad spectrum or is at least SPF 15 and can filter both UVA and UVB rays.
- ❑ Wear sunglasses that filter UV to protect your eyes and the skin around your eyes.

If you are concerned about having a low level of vitamin D from not being in the sun, talk with your doctor about supplements.

4. Don't use tanning beds, tanning booths, or sunlamps.



About This Brochure

This brochure will help you learn the signs of skin cancer. It will also help you learn what you can do to protect yourself.

It's important to find skin cancer early. If found early, skin cancer can be treated. If not treated early, it can grow even more. Skin cancer found at a late stage may be more serious and harder to treat.

Share this brochure with your loved ones so that you can all try to avoid skin cancer and stay healthy.

Contact the National Cancer Institute for more information.

- ❑ Call NCI's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) — available in English or Spanish
- ❑ Visit us at <https://www.cancer.gov> or <https://www.cancer.gov/espanol>
 - ❑ The Skin Cancer Home Page is at <https://www.cancer.gov/types/skin>
 - ❑ The Melanoma Home Page is at <https://www.cancer.gov/types/eye>
- ❑ Chat using LiveHelp, NCI's instant messaging service, at <https://www.cancer.gov/livehelp>
- ❑ E-mail us at cancergovstaff@mail.nih.gov
- ❑ Order publications at <https://www.cancer.gov/publications> or by calling 1-800-4-CANCER



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