Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is an uncontrollable growth of abnormal cells in the skin.

There are a main three types of skin cancer:-

- squamous cell carcinoma
- basal cell carcinoma
- melanoma

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) and basal cell carcinoma (BCC) are sometimes referred to as non-melanoma skin cancers. There are other rare skin cancers but they are treated in a variety of ways differently from SCC’s and BCC’s.

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC)

SCC’s are usually found on the parts of the body most often exposed to the sun, such as neck, lower legs, forearms and head. It often looks as a rapidly growing lump or as a thickened, scaly, red spot. SCC may also appear as a sore that hasn’t been healed. It may possibly be sore to touch, and in some cases mistaken as a skin sore (boil). The SCC’s grow quickly over several weeks or months and if left untreated it is possible for the SCC to spread to other parts of the body.

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC)

BCC’s generally develop on the upper body, neck and head. It may appear as a pearl shaped lump or a dry, scaly area that is either pale or bright pink and shiny. The BCC may become inflamed and bleed, and any dead tissue may “shed” off. Usually a BCC will have no symptoms as they tend to grow at a slow pace. They usually don’t spread to other parts of the body but if a BCC grows larger than 5cm or is left untreated, it causes a bigger threat. These threats include that it may expand and grow deeper into the skin and damage tissue close by. This then makes treatment difficult and increases the probability of the BCC returning. Having more than one BCC at a time is likely and having one increases the chance of having another. Therefore the earlier a BCC is found, the easier it is to treat and remove.
**Melanoma**

Melanoma considerably the most serious type of skin cancer. The melanoma often appears as an already existing spot/mark that even after several weeks or months that continues to change size, shape and colour. It may have an irregular surface or edge, and possibly more than one colour such as brown, red, blue, black, white and grey. Melanomas are rarely one colour such as, brown, black or red. If the cancer is left untreated, it may grow deeper into the skin to a point where the cancerous cells can escape and be transported through blood vessels or lymph to other parts of the body. The earlier the melanoma is diagnosed, the higher the chance of a cure.

**Statistics**

Yearly, in Australia:

- skin cancers are held accountable for 80% of newly diagnosed cancers
- from around 95 to 99% of skin cancers are caused by sun exposure
- over 1 million patients have consultations with their GP’s per year for skin cancer

**Incidence**

- Two in three Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer by the age of 70.
- From 1982 to 2010 diagnoses for melanoma increased by 60%.
- From 1998 to 2007 non-melanoma skin cancer treatments increased by 14%.
- Melanoma is the third most common cancer in Australian men and women
- In 2012, 2 036 people died from skin cancer

**Symptoms**

The earlier that a skin cancer identified and treat, the greater your chance of avoiding surgery, potential disfiguration or even possible death.

Always keep on the lookout for:

- A spot that is different from other spots on the skin
- Any new freckles, spots or moles changing in colour or appearance
- A spot that bleeds
- A sore that doesn’t heal

If you notice any of these signs, consult your doctor.
Causes

- Sunburn causes 95% of melanomas
- A tan is actually not asign of good health, tanning leads to many health issues including skin cancers
- Exposure to the sun that doesn’t result in burning can still cause skin cells to be damaged. This also increases your chance of developing skin cancer.

Prevention

There are many ways that skin cancers can be prevented

- Applying sunscreen liberally
- Covering as much skin as possible with loose fitting clothing
- Choosing a hat that protects the face, neck and ears
- Seek shade
- Wear some sunglasses

Support

Throughout the Upper Hunter Community/Muswellbrook there a several places you can reach out for support from both online and in person. You can visit your doctor for a consultation, visit the cancer council website, call the cancer council or seek support from your family and friends.


13 11 20 – Cancer Council call line