

BASAL CELL CARCINOMA (BCC)

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC) is a cancer of the basal cells, which are in the deep layers of the skin. BCC is the most common type of skin cancer. It is linked to damage from sun exposure. BCC may appear as a flat, brown or flesh-colored sore or as a waxy-appearing bump. Most commonly they will be found on the face, neck, chest, or back, or other areas that have been damaged by the sun. It almost always affects those over 40, and is seen in both males and females. Risk increases with a family history of skin cancer; in fair-skinned, blond, and red-haired persons; with exposure to excessive sun and, possibly, with exposure to certain chemicals.

Symptoms may include:

- A non-healing raised sore on the skin. It grows very slowly.
- Painless, and does not itch. It may break open, bleed, crust over, and then break open again.
- Sores that can occur anywhere on the skin that has been sun-damaged.
- Untreated, the sores can ulcerate and cause damage to surrounding tissues.

What your doctor can do:

- Diagnose BCC by asking about your symptoms, examining the sores, and taking a sample of tissue to study (*biopsy*)

Treatment depends on size, depth, and location of the lesion. There are several different methods used to remove the cancers including:

- *Cryosurgery* (kills the cells by freezing them)
- Removal with a surgical scalpel
- Destruction of the tissue with heat
- If a large part of the skin needs to be removed, a skin graft may be done.

What you can do:

- Following removal of a lesion, use a sterile saline solution twice a day on the wound, then pat dry.
- To protect it from sun and injury, cover with an adhesive bandage during the day. Leave it uncovered at night.
- Wash it as usual when bathing.
- Use an antibiotic ointment on the wound if recommended by your doctor.
- Protection from recurrence includes limiting exposure to sun. Decrease the amount of time you spend in the sun. Protect your skin from overexposure with a hat, clothing, and high-protection sunscreen with protective factor of 15 or more.
- Perform a skin self-exam once a month.
- Consult your doctor for any new or changed lesions. In addition, have regular medical exams at least annually.

What you can expect:

- If not treated, this type of cancer can cause damage to local tissues and, although BCC rarely spreads to other body tissues, it can happen.
- Fortunately, treatment is fairly simple and nearly all BCCs are curable with early treatment.
- However, over a third of people who have one lesion will develop a new lesion within 5 years.

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Contact your doctor if you have any new or changed skin lesions; or if, after surgery, there are signs of infection at the site including pain, redness, swelling, or increased tenderness.

This material has been provided by your doctor as an educational tool and is not meant to take the place of professional care. Please consult your doctor for any questions, concerns or changes in your condition.

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