

# skin cancer

protect yourself: know the facts

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## What is skin cancer?

Skin cancer begins when cells that are not normal grow on the skin. Skin cancer most often appears on the head, face, neck, hands and arms. Most skin cancers appear after age 50, but the sun damages the skin from early childhood.

There are three types of skin cancer: basal cell, squamous cell, and melanoma. The first two types are easy to cure if found early. Melanoma is the most dangerous type. It can spread quickly to other parts of the body. If not treated, melanoma can result in death.

## What causes skin cancer?

**Most skin cancers are caused by ultraviolet (UV) radiation.** UV radiation comes from the sun, sunlamps and tanning beds. People of all races can get skin cancer, but those with fair skin and blonde or red hair are most at risk. Your chance of getting skin cancer increases if you have a large number of moles, had sunburns as a child, or if you have a family member who has had the disease.

## What are the symptoms?

Skin cancer is usually not painful. The most common symptoms are a new growth on the skin, a change in an old growth, or a sore that does not heal. Not all skin cancers are the same. They may look pale or red. They may feel crusty, flat, scaly, smooth or firm. The first sign of melanoma is often a new mole or a change in the size, shape, color or feel of an existing mole. Most melanomas have a black or blue-black area.

## How can I protect myself?

- Stay out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., whenever possible.
- Wear long sleeves, long pants, and a hat with a wide brim when you are in the sun.
- Choose wraparound sunglasses that block close to 100 percent of the sun's UV rays.
- Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. Re-apply every two hours.
- Avoid tanning beds and sunlamps.
- Do a skin self-exam once a month.
- After age 50, ask your doctor to examine your skin as part of your routine checkup.



## How to do a skin self-exam

- Learn where your usual birthmarks, moles, and other marks are. Get used to how they look and feel.
- Do a skin self exam after a shower or bath. Make sure you have plenty of light. Use a full-length and a hand-held mirror.
- Look for any changes to your usual marks or new moles, patches, bumps or sores. Check your hands, fingernails and arms. Examine your legs, genital area, and between your buttocks. Sit and look closely at your feet, including your toenails, soles, and between your toes.
- Ask a friend or family member to help you check your scalp and back.
- Report changes or new marks to your health care provider.

Remember, it is important to protect your children from the sun too. Most skin damage happens before age 18. Infants six months and younger should not be in the sun at all. Older children should follow the sun protection tips listed above.

### Where can I get more information?

For information about cancer resources in your community, call the Kentucky Cancer Program at **(859) 219-0772**. For information on all types of cancer, call the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service at **1-800-4-CANCER** or go to **www.cancer.gov**, or call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-ACS-2345** or go to **www.cancer.org**.

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