

Treatments for Skin Cancer Explained

Patients diagnosed with skin cancer used to have limited options. Surgery, radiation and chemotherapy were usually the other treatments offered. Today, new treatments for skin cancer offer hope and promise for countless patients.

If you've been diagnosed with skin cancer, you may be wondering what treatment options are available to you. Even if your doctor has already explained the therapy details to you, it can be difficult to absorb all the technical and medical jargon that was used. Patients often feel lost and overwhelmed by the information, and even unable to comprehend the details due to the shock of the diagnosis.

This brief description of some of the many treatments for skin cancer is to be used for information only. The treatment that works best for you will depend solely on your individual case and requirements.

Surgery

Most doctors will perform surgery as initial treatments for skin cancer. Your surgeon might take a small tissue sample for biopsy, or may decide to remove all of the cancerous tissues and some of the surrounding skin. The amount of healthy skin removed will depend on the specific type of cancer found, and how deep it has spread into your body. An area of one to two centimeters of surrounding skin is usually removed.

Freezing

The tissues damaged by some types of skin cancers can be removed by freezing. This technique is performed using a substance called liquid nitrogen. A similar method involves removal using a drug called imiquimod.

Lymph Node Surgery

If skin cancer has spread into the lymph nodes, more extensive surgery will be required. This is confirmed if a sentinel node shows cancer cells following a biopsy of a suspect area. The technique involves the removal of lymph nodes near the cancer, as well as affected skin around the cancerous area. Radiotherapy is usually performed after the surgery.

Interferon Alfa 2B

Some patients undergo a course of treatment using interferon alfa 2b following surgery. This is often performed in cases where skin cancer is expected to return. Immunotherapy in the form of interferon alfa 2b may also be given to help your immune system fight the cancer.

Immunotherapy Cancer Vaccination

While still under development and review, researchers are working on an exciting possibility called immunotherapy cancer vaccination. This treatment is not widely available.

Chemotherapy

Following surgery, chemotherapy may be given. This therapy uses strong drugs taken orally or intravenously to kill the cancerous cells.

There is no definite cure or prevention of skin cancer, but there are a number of steps that you can take to minimize your chance of developing the disease. The most important key to prevention, yet the one most commonly ignored, is simply minimizing your direct exposure to the sun.

Every human being regardless of skin color is at risk of developing skin cancer, although people with fair skin do face a greater skin cancer risk. Children and adults alike must protect exposed skin using a sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher. You should wear protective clothing including a hat. It's also wise to avoid the sun altogether during peak hours, staying indoors or finding a shady spot between 11 am and 3 pm when the sun's rays are at their strongest. Sunlamps and tanning salons should also be avoided, as they emit the same harmful UV rays that cause skin cancer.

You need to be aware of your entire body, and know the signs of skin cancer. Inspect your skin regularly for moles and lesions. If you notice something that doesn't look right, see your doctor as soon as possible to receive prompt medical attention. Early diagnosis and treatment are important to fight and overcome skin cancer.

A variety of factors will determine which type of treatment you will receive. Your age, the area of your body affected by cancer, and the type of skin cancer are all relevant issues. Your healthcare provider will conduct a series of consultations to determine the best treatment plan and advise you which treatment is the best for you.