

**SKIN CANCER
(BASAL-CELL CARCINOMA)**

What causes skin cancer?

The skin cancer (basal-cell carcinoma) for which you are being treated is common and *always curable*. Basal-cell cancers are the result of sun damage to the skin. Sunlight ages the skin cells, causing their growth to be disturbed. A basal-cell cancer begins as a small spot that grows slowly and relentlessly until treated. Basal-cell cancers enlarge steadily, but they *never* spread to distant parts of the body and *never* invade internal tissues.

Microscopic examination is necessary to determine whether a growth is cancerous. This is why the biopsy test was done.

Skin cancers are most common on the face, neck and arms since these are the sun-exposed areas. Fair-skinned individuals are more prone to skin cancer than darker persons, since skin pigment protects the skin.

Treatment

Basal-cell cancers are best treated early, when they are small, since it is simpler to remove a small growth than a large one. Surgical removal of basal-cell cancers is almost 100% curative.

Very rarely a cancer will grow back. In order to detect this rare event, the treated area should be checked periodically. If you become concerned about the treated area or if other skin growths appear, please return to my office promptly.

Prevention

The skin-damaging effects of sunlight are permanent and build up slowly over time. As many as 40-50 or more years can pass between the time of sun exposure and the time the skin shows signs of sun damage. Thus, children and teenagers often pay for their sunburns and deep tans when they reach their 50s and 60s. There is no way of undoing sun damage. You can prevent further skin injury by using sun-protective measures such as protective clothing and sunscreens.

With the passage of time, skin cancer patients can develop additional skin cancers. If you notice a new growth or a sore that does not heal be sure to have it checked.