

attack cancer cells or stimulate the immune system to fight the disease.

Melanoma, on the other hand, is usually treated through surgery alone. Removal of the surrounding tissue depends on the thickness of the tumour. Biological therapy, where certain substances travel through the blood affecting cells all over the body, is often used in advanced stages of the disease.

What can I do to prevent skin cancer?

You should get familiar with your skin and be able to recognise mole, freckle, and birth mark patterns. Perform a monthly self-examination and note changes in the number, size, shape or colour of spots on your skin. Also have someone else check your back. The ABCDEs of melanoma should be kept in mind when performing an examination.

A Asymmetry – One of the spots does not match the other half.

B Borders – Normal moles will be round or oval. The borders of a melanoma will not be regular and may be uneven or notched.

C Color – Common moles are usually one consistent colour. Melanoma may be tan, black, brown or even red, white and blue.

D Diameter – Pay special attention to spots larger than 6 mm in diameter.

E Evolution – A change in physical appearance of melanocytic growth are often observed over time.

Avoid overexposure to sunlight. Wear protective clothing, sunglasses, and hats. Use umbrellas when there is intense sunlight. Use sunscreen lotion with a sun protection factor or SPF of 30 or higher, regardless of whether the sun is out or not. Replenish sunscreen every one or two hours if you go swimming or sweat excessively.

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INFORMATION ON SKIN CANCER



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What is skin cancer?

The skin protects the body, preventing water loss, shielding internal organs from injury, and protecting our genetic information from damage.

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer but also the most preventable. There are three types of skin cancer:

- 1 **Basal cell carcinoma** – This type of cancer almost never spreads to other parts of the body but can cause damage by invading its surrounding area.
- 2 **Squamous cell carcinoma** – This skin cancer forms in the cells found in the tissue that forms the skin's surface. This type of skin cancer can spread to other parts of the body.
- 3 **Melanoma** – This type of skin cancer, which develops in the pigment cells of the skin, is the most dangerous and may spread to other parts of the body, causing serious illness or even death.

Melanomas are the most common type of skin cancer in Pakistan in both the young and old population, with rapidly increasing incidence due to an increased exposure to its risk factors.

What are its symptoms?

The most common symptoms of skin cancer include a sore that does not heal, pigment that spreads from the border into surrounding skin, and tenderness, itchiness, pain or any other

change of sensation in a particular area of skin. A change in the surface of the mole such as experiencing oozing or bleeding and the appearance of a bump or nodule are also symptoms of skin cancer.

Other diseases may also lead to similar symptoms. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms you should schedule an appointment with your doctor as soon as possible to diagnose the problem and have it treated early.

What are the risk factors associated with skin cancer?

The risk factors associated with skin cancer include:

- 1 **Overexposure to the sun** – This is the leading cause of skin cancer. Sunlight contains UVA and UVB, which cause mutation in skin cells, resulting in the development of melanoma.
- 2 **Family history** – If you have someone in your family who has had melanoma, you are 8 to 12 times more likely to develop it.
- 3 **Race** – If you are Caucasian, you are more likely to develop skin cancer.
- 4 **Physical attributes** – If you have pale skin that does not tan easily, red or blond hair, blue eyes, and a number of moles or freckles, you have a higher risk of developing skin cancer.
- 5 **Exposure to chemicals** – If you are

constantly using coal tar, hair dyes, petroleum derivatives, cleaning products, and arsenic among others, you are at risk of developing skin cancer.

- 6 **Any illness that suppresses the immune system** – Such as HIV, can result in skin cancer.

What tests will I have to take to detect skin cancer?

Your physician will review your medical history and conduct a physical exam. If your doctor suspects some of your symptoms to be associated with skin cancer, you may be asked to have a biopsy, where a tissue sample is removed from the suspected spot on the skin to be examined by a pathologist under a microscope to determine if it is cancerous or not.

What is the treatment for this type of cancer?

There are many types of treatment options for skin cancer:

Basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma are treated in a similar manner, usually removing it using a spoon-like instrument called a curette and then applying an electrical current to control the bleeding and kill other cancer cells. Chemotherapy, using anti-cancer drugs to eliminate cancer cells, and radiation therapy, using high-energy radiation rays to destroy cancer cells, are used in skin areas difficult to treat with surgery. In some cases, topical drugs are used