Support and Resources

If you're dealing with a skin cancer diagnosis or concerned about skin cancer, there are organisations and resources that can help:

- **Cancer Research UK:** Provides comprehensive information on types of skin cancer, treatments, and lifestyle tips for prevention.
- **Macmillan Cancer Support:** Offers support for individuals and families affected by cancer, including practical, emotional, and financial assistance, as well as a helpline (0808 808 00 00) and local support groups.

Your GP or dermatologist can also provide further information, referrals and support options specific to your needs. Don't hesitate to reach out, help is available.

Take Action Today

Protect your skin, stay informed and regularly self-examine your skin. It could save your life. Skin cancer is preventable and when caught early, highly treatable. For more information contact your GP or visit:

Skcin
https://www.skcin.org/skincancerinformation/theproblemandfacts.htm

Melanoma UK
https://www.melanomauk.org.uk/

Harbourside Family Practice

Marina Healthcare Centre

2 Haven View

Portishead

BS20 7QA

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Harbourside
Family Practice

Skin Cancer: A Comprehensive Guide to Symptoms, Prevention, and Screening



Understanding Skin Cancer

Skin cancer occurs when abnormal skin cells grow uncontrollably, often due to damage from UV (ultraviolet) radiation from the sun or tanning beds. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer but is also one of the most preventable. There are three main types of skin cancer:

1. **Basal cell carcinoma (BCC):** The most common type, often appearing as a pearly bump or flesh-colored mole. BCCs grow slowly and rarely spread.
2. **Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC):** Typically appears as a scaly, red patch or sore that may bleed. SCC can spread if left untreated.
3. **Melanoma:** The least common but most dangerous form. Melanoma develops in the pigment-producing cells (melanocytes) and can spread rapidly if not detected early.

Symptoms to Watch For

Early detection is key to effective treatment. Be aware of changes in your skin, and look for the following symptoms:

- **New growths:** Look for any new moles, growths, or spots.
- **Changes in existing moles:** Be alert to changes in size, shape, color, or texture.
- **Asymmetry:** One half of the mole doesn't match the other.
- **Border:** Irregular, ragged, or blurred edges.
- **Color:** Varied shades or unusual colors like red, white, or blue.
- **Diameter:** Larger than a pencil eraser (6mm).
- **Evolving:** Changes in size, shape, or symptoms (such as itching or bleeding).

If you notice any of these symptoms, consult a healthcare provider promptly.

Prevention: What You Can Do

While some risk factors (like genetics) can't be controlled, there are several ways you can reduce your risk of skin cancer:

- **Limit sun exposure:** Seek shade, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun's rays are strongest.
- **Wear protective clothing:** Hats, sunglasses, and long sleeves provide additional protection.
- **Use sunscreen:** Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher on exposed skin, even on cloudy days. Reapply every two hours and after swimming or sweating.
- **Avoid tanning beds:** They can expose skin to high levels of UV radiation, increasing skin cancer risk.
- **Be mindful of reflective surfaces:** Water, sand, and snow can reflect UV rays, increasing exposure.

Screening: Early Detection Saves Lives

Regular skin checks help detect skin cancer at an early stage when it's most treatable. You can perform a monthly self-exam, examining your skin head-to-toe in front of a mirror. Don't forget to check hard-to-see areas, such as your back and scalp. If you have a higher risk (such as a family history of skin cancer or numerous moles), consult your doctor about regular skin exams by a professional.

Early detection through screening can prevent skin cancer from becoming life-threatening. Your healthcare provider can guide you on the right screening frequency based on your personal risk factors.

When to see a Doctor

See a healthcare provider if you notice:

- A new growth or sore that doesn't heal.
- Changes in a mole or existing skin lesion.
- Persistent itching, tenderness, or pain in a specific area.

Early intervention is essential for the best treatment outcomes, so don't hesitate to reach out if you have any concerns.