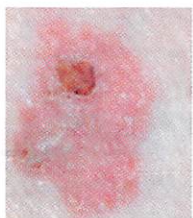


Skin Cancer

As summertime approaches, Dr Tharakaram, Consultant Dermatologist at The Tunbridge Wells Nuffield Hospital gives some helpful advice and information.

THE PHRASE "skin cancer" evokes a sense of fear but the vast majority of skin cancers are curable and not life threatening. The importance is early recognition and treatment. In this the most important person to be aware of is yourself so that you can get checked.

Broadly speaking there are 3 types of skin cancers: Basal cell carcinoma (also known as rodent ulcer); Squamous cell carcinoma; Malignant melanoma.



Basal cell carcinoma

Usually presents as a pearly small area on sun exposed skin such as the face. This is the commonest cancer.

Sometimes it may appear as a scabby sore which does not heal for months. It grows slowly over years and eats into the surrounding skin, hence the name "rodent ulcer". It is more common in the fair skinned who have been exposed to the sun for long periods of time, as with farmers, builders, etc, or service in hot countries, as in the forces. This type does not spread to internal organs. It is easy to treat and can be removed by surgery, radiotherapy, or a new type of light treatment called photodynamic therapy. In strategic areas, such as the nose or eyelids, a special kind of surgery called Moh's Micrographic Surgery ensures the rodent ulcer is fully removed.



Squamous cell carcinoma

Is also common and is also related to sun damage. Early on, it presents as small scaly whitish areas (solar keratosis) on the face, ears,

and hands of white people who have spent a lot of time outdoors in the sun. These can change into small pea-sized lumpy areas or sores that fail to heal. These can sometimes spread. They can be treated by surgery to remove them.

Bowen's disease

Is a skin cancer, but only in the upper layer of the skin and the potential to spread is zero. Usually this is seen on the legs of elderly women as a flat red scaly patch. Bowen's disease is treatable with cryo (cold) therapy with liquid nitrogen gas (-190 degrees C) or a cream called Efidix.



Malignant melanoma

This is a potentially serious skin cancer; but it is curable if detected early. More common in middle aged white people but younger

people are also getting these. Sun exposure, a family history of melanoma and the presence of numerous (more than 50 in adults) abnormal moles all over the body are risk factors.

A melanoma may grow flatly in the upper layer of skin or deeply, so when a melanoma is cut out, the pathologist checks how thick it is under the microscope and this is called Breslow's thickness. Melanomas which grow deeply have a higher Breslow's thickness and are at higher risk of spreading to other organs.

There are different types of melanomas such as lentigo maligna melanoma which is easily treatable,

superficial spreading melanoma which is thicker and nodular melanoma which is thicker still.

Mole "ABCD" check list

A: ASYMMETRY

looked from the top one half of the mole is not like the other half – the mole is expanding asymmetrically.

B: BORDER

the border margins of the mole are irregular.

C: COLOUR

the mole is BLACK in colour or there are different shades of colours in the same mole – black, red, pale

D: DIAMETER of the mole is over 7 mm

if a mole doubles in size in a matter of days to weeks rather than months to years, GET IT CHECKED!!

The important message is that melanomas are curable if detected early. The best person to check the moles is yourself. The idea is early detection in picking out the "black sheep" amongst the mundane moles. The vast majority of them are harmless. If in doubt, please see your doctor.

Prevention of Skin Cancers

Reduce sun exposure: (as the Australians say SLIP, SLAP AND SLOP)...wear a hat, wear a full sleeve shirt, apply sun screens and avoid the mid-day burning sun between 11am-3pm when it is very hot!! Never get a sunburn and avoid using sunbeds. All sun damage adds on and is cumulative.

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For further information please call the Tunbridge Wells Nuffield Hospital Helpline on: 01892 552932.

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