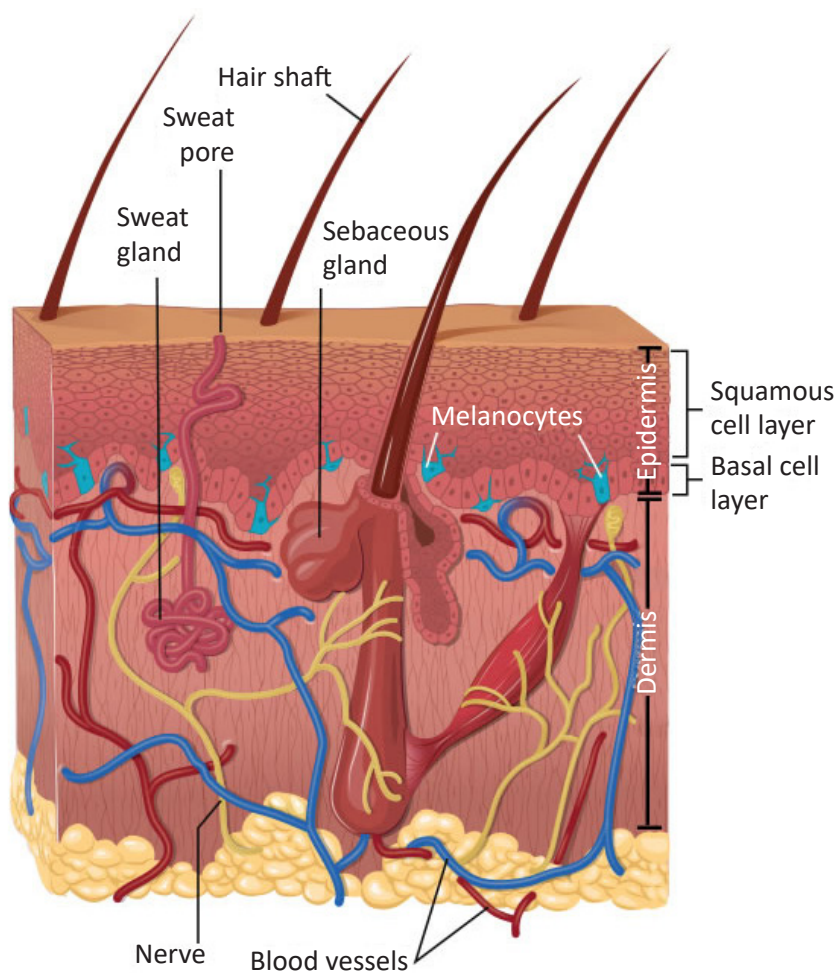


Skin Cancer

Your skin has 3 main layers: epidermis, dermis and a layer of fatty tissue. Skin cancer most often forms in the epidermis, which is the outermost layer of skin. The epidermis has 3 main types of cells: squamous cells, basal cells and melanocytes.

If you have any questions, please ask your nurse or physician.



2018 "What is Skin Cancer" Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

The 2 most common forms of skin cancer are **basal cell cancer** and **squamous cell cancer**.

Basal cell cancer is the most common type of skin cancer. It usually grows slowly. This cancer rarely spreads to lymph nodes or distant organs. But if left untreated, it can grow and invade nearby tissues.

Squamous cell cancer is the second most common type of skin cancer. It is more aggressive and likely to spread into the deeper layer of the skin. This type of skin cancer can also spread to nearby lymph nodes or distant organs. Early detection is key. If found early, treatment is straightforward and outcomes are typically good.

Causes of skin cancer

Many risk factors can lead to skin cancer. Males are at a higher risk of developing skin cancer.

You have a higher risk of getting skin cancer if you have:

- Fair skin
- A family history of skin cancers
- Actinic keratosis
 - Actinic keratosis causes scaly patches on your skin, typically in sun-exposed areas. They can develop into squamous cell carcinoma.
- A history of bad sunburns or have used tanning beds
 - Ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun or tanning beds can damage building blocks in your skin cells, which can make them malignant (cancerous).

Symptoms

Skin cancer appears as a new spot on the skin that looks different than most of the other spots you have.

Watch for any changes in:

- Size
- Shape
- Color
- Texture

Basal cell cancer usually forms a firm or smooth, red or pink lump. Squamous cell cancer usually forms a flat, reddish, rough or scaly patch.

Diagnosing skin cancer

If you have signs of skin cancer, you will need to see a head and neck surgeon (if the cancer is on your head or neck) and a dermatologist (skin physician). They will examine you.

If a physician examines you and is concerned about possible skin cancer, they will perform a biopsy. That means the physician will remove a small piece of tissue from the skin growth. They can do this during an office visit.

Another type of biopsy is a fine needle aspiration (FNA). The surgeon does this by removing tissue from neck lymph nodes through a thin needle. They often use an ultrasound to direct the needle precisely into the skin growth. They will examine the tissue under a microscope. The surgeon does an FNA in the office.

Resources

cancer.org/cancer/skin-cancer.html

For more information, please contact:

Head and Neck Multidisciplinary Clinic at Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Galter Pavilion, 675 North Saint Clair Street
Suite 15-200
Chicago, Illinois 60611
Phone: 312.695.8182 (TTY: 711)
Fax: 312.695.6298