

The Many Faces of Skin Cancer

Know What to Watch

David V. Poole, MD

Skin cancers can have an innocent appearance, so it's possible that even someone who takes good care of his or her skin may not realize how important it is to get a lesion, mark, or mole checked out by an expert. If it turns out to be a skin cancer, every day you wait will allow the cancer to grow larger, making its treatment more difficult. While there are many different treatment options for skin cancers, if surgical removal is necessary, you want the cancer to be as small as possible.

Note that your esthetician may be aware of skin cancer symptoms and may be able to alert you to a change in your skin; however, he or she is not allowed to make a diagnosis. Your practitioner

Basal Cell Carcinoma

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC) is the most common form of skin cancer. It arises from the outer layer of the skin, and it has a strong relationship to sun exposure. It usually invades and destroys tissue only in the area where it is; spreading to another part of the body is rare. A typical BCC has a pearly or waxy nodule with a rolled border and tiny spider veins on and around it.

Squamous Cell

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) is the second most common form of malignant skin cancer. It accounts for about 10 percent of all skin malignancies. It is also most commonly

"Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it."

- W. A. Ward

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Keep an eye out for skin issues, as early detection is the key to successful treatment.

may, though, be able to provide you with an appropriate referral to a dermatologist or other physician.

Following is a brief overview of the most common types of skin cancer. Additional details can be found at www.skincancer.org, the website of the Skin Cancer Foundation.

seen on sun-damaged skin, but it can arise without sun exposure or from various preexisting skin lesions, such as actinic keratoses, burn scars, radiation-exposed or treated skin, or even in areas of chronic skin irritation. SCC is most often "local" but can spread to surrounding tissues or even other

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parts of the body. SCCs most often are found in red, irritated, sun-damaged skin. They often have a scaly, red, crusted appearance and may have an ulcer in them. The tissue is often fragile and may bleed easily when rubbed.

Malignant Melanoma

Malignant melanoma is the least common of the three main types of skin cancer, but it is the most dangerous. While there are several varieties of malignant melanoma, the only thing you absolutely need to know about them is that any of them can be deadly; malignant melanoma accounts for most of the deaths related to skin cancer. The most disturbing statistic is that despite public education campaigns about the dangers of sun exposure and skin cancer, the incidence of malignant melanoma in the United States continues to rise. Fair-skinned people, such as blondes and redheads in particular, need to watch their skin closely.

Any mole or pigmented spot on their body that changes in any way should be checked. If it gets bigger, darker, changes shape, has irregular edges, is or becomes asymmetric, has light and dark areas in it, or ever bleeds, it should be checked immediately. The ABCDs of melanoma are:

- A: Asymmetry
- B: Borders that are irregular
- C: Color changes
- D: Diameter that is enlarging

With early detection and treatment, most can be successfully removed and the patient completely cured. However, if not detected and treated early, these killers can spread to the lungs, the liver, the brain, and elsewhere.

Other Skin Things

It is important to note that not everything that shows up on the skin is a skin cancer. Unfortunately, with age often comes a lot of skin "things." Actinic keratoses (patches of sun-damaged skin) are often seen as patches of dry, scaly skin that can be red and irritated. These are most often found on frequently sun-exposed areas of the

body, such as the head and neck. If treated properly, these will go away. If left untreated, up to 20 percent will turn into skin cancer.

Seborrheic keratoses are often scary-looking skin lesions that enlarge over time. They are generally pigmented, and have a raised, wart-looking appearance. Cosmetically they can be unsightly, but fortunately have little potential to turn into skin cancer.

Dermatitis (irritation of the skin) comes in as many different shapes, sizes, varieties, and causes as you can think of. Things such as new laundry soap or a new piece of jewelry can cause what is known as contact dermatitis (irritation of the skin when something contacts it). Often these will go away on their own, but treatments are available to reduce discomfort.

Advice to Live By

Remember, most of the things on the skin are not skin cancer. But for that small percentage that are, often the only way to know is to have it checked by a skin care expert. Early detection and

treatment of skin cancer is the key to successful treatment and cure. Have any questionable spot on your skin evaluated by a physician. If necessary, ask for a referral to a dermatologist or plastic surgeon in your area who treats skin cancers on a regular basis. When in doubt, check it out.

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Sun protection is crucial for everyone, as sun damage is a leading cause of skin cancer.

Happiness is Contagious

Maybe mom was right. Research suggests that surrounding yourself with friends and family who are happy can actually increase your own happiness.

Scientists at Harvard University and the University of California, San Diego, found that emotions, particularly happiness, have a viral effect in how they spread from one person to another. For every happy person in your physical social network, you have a 9 percent chance of increasing your own happiness. The effect is more pronounced the closer someone is to you geographically, and it does not seem to include electronic communications. The study, "Dynamic Spread of Happiness in a Large Social Network," can be found online in the British Medical Journal (www.bmj.com).

This is especially good news considering the potential health benefits of happiness and positivity. A study published in Stroke magazine has indicated a "significant association" between optimism and a reduced risk of

stroke. This is in addition to studies that have linked optimism to a healthier immune system, faster wound healing, and a lower risk of heart disease. While the exact cause of the benefits is not clear, one theory is that optimistic people are more likely to take care of their health. In addition, there is hope that teaching optimism could become part of a preventative program for various conditions.

What's one way to get happy? Pamper yourself! Exposure to stress, a contributing factor to unhappiness, over a long period of time can increase the rate of neural degeneration and increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease. Luckily, a study from Umea University in Sweden has shown that just five minutes of massage has the potential to lower stress, and 80 minutes of massage has a tremendously positive effect on stress levels. Get pampered, get happy, and cheer up your friends and family!



Surrounding yourself with happy people is healthy!

Probiotics for Skin Health Trust Your Gut on This One!

Shelley Burns, N.D.

Digestive health plays an important role in how skin appears on the surface. When digestion is not working optimally, it allows toxins to be reabsorbed in the body instead of being eliminated. The body then mounts a state of emergency as it's overwhelmed by toxins, some of them bad bacteria. These manifest directly on the surface for all the world to see, in the form of wrinkles, blotchiness, skin rashes, and acne.

This is where probiotics come into play. Probiotics contain potentially beneficial bacteria found in the digestive tract--what some call good gut bacteria. They help strengthen the digestive system but they also play an important role in skin health. Probiotics consist of *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, and *Bifidobacterium bifidum*. They have anti-inflammatory, anti-pathogenic, and antiallergenic properties and can be used prophylactically and therapeutically.

There have been many studies showing benefits of probiotics to skin health. For

example, there's a correlation between an imbalance of good and bad bacteria and the onset of acne. When bringing natural bacteria back into balance with a probiotic intervention, acne improves, in some studies, as much as 50 percent of the time.

There is no recommended daily intake for probiotics, but good food sources include buttermilk, kefir, miso, tempeh, yogurt, and other fermented foods. Supplements are generally higher in potency and are used for therapeutic purposes in treating irritable bowel syndrome, Crohn's disease, colitis, and many other conditions.

While probiotics are essential for healthy skin and digestive health, there are many other appealing benefits to encourage their use, such as strengthening the immune system, replacing good bacteria after a course of antibiotics, and contributing to general health and well-being.

One note: Some probiotic supplements come from dairy sources and may not be

suitable for individuals with dairy allergies or sensitivities.

*"Acknowledging
the good that
you already have
in your life is the
foundation for
all abundance."*

-Eckhart Tolle

Hey there Leading Lady! I hope you have enjoyed this month's issue of the Leading Lady Newsletter. I have am grateful that you invested a couple of minutes in yourself to read through the articles. Have a productive and fulfilling month!

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