

# Skin Cancer

## Basal Cell Carcinoma

### Definitions

#### Basal cell:

A cell located at the bottom of the skin's epidermis, or outer skin layer.

#### Carcinoma:

A type of cancerous, or malignant, tumor.

#### Pathologist:

A physician who examines tissues and fluids to diagnose disease in order to assist in making treatment decisions.

### What Is Basal Cell Carcinoma?

The most common of all cancers, Basal Cell Carcinoma affects 800,000 Americans each year. One of three cancers in America is a skin cancer, and 75 percent of skin cancers are Basal Cell Carcinoma. This type of cancer has a 95 percent cure rate but can cause complications or even death if it is neglected.

### Who is most likely to have Basal Cell Carcinoma?

This slow-growing disease affects individuals who have regular exposure to sunlight. Until recently, this cancer was most common in older people, particularly men who worked outdoors. Now, however, more women and younger individuals are being diagnosed with Basal Cell Carcinoma, especially those who spend leisure time in the sun.

People with fair skin; blonde or red hair; or blue, green, or gray eyes have higher than average risk. People with Basal Cell Carcinoma have about a 50 percent chance of developing another tumor within the next five years. Avoid long exposure to the sun, especially at midday, to prevent Basal Cell Carcinoma. If outdoors for a long time, consider wearing a hat, sunscreen, longsleeves, and a long skirt or pants.

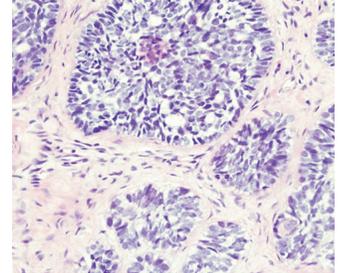
### What characterizes Basal Cell Carcinoma?

Basal Cell Carcinoma occurs most often on areas of the body frequently exposed to the sun – the face, ears, neck, scalp, shoulders, and back. Tumors sometimes develop on areas not often exposed to the sun, but this is rare. Other contributing factors are exposure to or contact with arsenic or radiation, or complications from burns, scars, or tattoos.

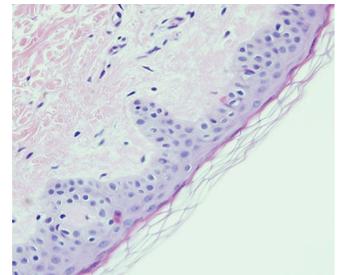
Basal Cell Carcinoma sometimes resembles psoriasis or eczema; therefore, a physician should examine your skin regularly and suggest regular time intervals for examination depending upon your risk factors. Watch for changes in size, color, texture, and appearance, as well as skin pain, bleeding, itching, or inflammation. Common characteristics of Basal Cell Carcinoma include a bleeding or non-healing sore, a reddish patch, a shiny bump, a pink growth, or a scarred area.

### How does a pathologist diagnose Basal Cell Carcinoma?

Your primary care physician or specialist will gather a *biopsy specimen* from an area of the skin with Basal Cell Carcinoma characteristics for the pathologist to examine under a microscope.



*Basal Cell Carcinoma has a 95 percent cure rate but can cause complications or even death if neglected.*



*Normal skin cells.*

For more information, go to: [www.skincancer.org](http://www.skincancer.org) (Skin Cancer Foundation) or [www.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.nlm.nih.gov) (National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health). Type the keywords Basal Cell Carcinoma or Skin Cancer into the search box.