

Understanding Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC): A Guide for Patients

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What is Squamous Cell Carcinoma?

Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC) is a type of skin cancer that occurs within flat cells on the top layer of your skin called squamous cells. Your skin is made up of layers, protecting your body from germs, sunburn, and injury. Squamous cells are the guardians of your skin, but sometimes, when they grow out of control, they can cause cancer. This usually happens because of too much sun exposure or other harmful activities like using tanning beds. SCC can grow in different parts of your body, but it loves the sun. That means it often shows up on places like your head, neck, arms, or anywhere else that gets a lot of sunlight¹.

Why Do People Get SCC?

Sunlight is the main reason people get SCC, as it has UV rays that damage the skin. Other reasons include²:

- Having light skin that easily burns in the sun.
- Being of older age (Increased sun exposure over the years.)
- Having a weak immune system or undergoing medical treatments that make it easier for cancer to grow.
- Injuries or wounds that don't heal properly.
- Special health conditions or genes passed down from your family may also make your skin more sensitive to the sun.

How Do You Know If You Have SCC?

SCC can look different from person to person. It might show up as a rough or scaly spot, or as a bump that can be smooth or have a crust on top. These spots or bumps can grow slowly or quickly and are usually found on parts of your body that get a lot of sun. If your doctor thinks a spot on your skin might be SCC, they will take a small piece of it (a biopsy) to look at it more closely under a microscope³.

What Happens If You Have SCC?

Doctors look at SCC closely to see if it's the kind that grows quickly or if it might spread to other parts of your body. Using specialized guidelines, if they believe the SCC is more serious, they might do additional tests to see if it has spread in your body³.

Treating SCC

Treating SCC depends on a few things like where the cancer is, how big it is, and your overall health. The main treatment is usually surgery to remove the cancer. Mohs surgery is a special procedure used to treat skin cancer, including SCC. It involves carefully removing the cancer

layer by layer and checking each layer under a microscope until all the cancer is gone. This method helps save as much healthy skin as possible while making sure the cancer is fully removed. Radiation therapy is another way to treat SCC, especially in older patients or those who are unable to undergo Mohs surgery³.

Sometimes for SCC that is not as deep, other treatments may include freezing or burning it off, creams that help your immune system fight the cancer or make it difficult for the cancer cells to grow, and special light treatments³.

Looking After Your Skin

After you've had SCC, it's super important to keep an eye on your skin. This means going to the doctor for skin check-ups every year and learning how to check your own skin for anything new or changing³.

Protecting your skin from the sun is key! Wear sunscreen, hats, and long sleeves, and try to stay out of the sun when UV ray exposure is strongest¹. Remember, catching SCC early and protecting your skin from the sun can make a big difference!

Understanding Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC): A Guide for Caregivers

What is Squamous Cell Carcinoma?

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Why Do People Get SCC?

Sunlight is the main reason people get SCC, as it has UV rays that damage the skin. Other reasons include²:

- Having light skin that easily burns in the sun.
- Being of older age (Increased sun exposure over the years.)
- Having a weak immune system or undergoing medical treatments that make it easier for cancer to grow.
- Injuries or wounds that don't heal properly.
- Special health conditions or genes passed down from in your loved one's family may also make your loved one's skin more sensitive to the sun.

How Do You Know If Your Loved One Has SCC?

SCC can look different from person to person. It might show up as a rough or scaly spot, or as a bump that can be smooth or have a crust on top. These spots or bumps can grow slowly or quickly and are usually found on parts of the body that get a lot of sun. If your loved one's doctor thinks a spot on your skin might be SCC, they will take a small piece of it (a biopsy) to look at it more closely under a microscope³.

What Happens If Your Loved One Has SCC?

Doctors look at SCC closely to see if it's the kind that grows quickly or if it might spread to other parts of your body. Using specialized guidelines, if they believe the SCC is more serious, they might do additional tests to see if it has spread in your body³.

Treating SCC

Treating SCC depends on a few things like where the cancer is, how big it is, and your loved one's overall health. The main treatment is usually surgery to remove the cancer. Mohs surgery is a special procedure used to treat skin cancer, including SCC. It involves carefully removing the cancer layer by layer and checking each layer under a microscope until all the cancer is gone.

This method helps save as much healthy skin as possible while making sure the cancer is fully removed. Radiation therapy is another way to treat SCC, especially in older patients or those who are unable to undergo Mohs surgery³.

Sometimes for SCC that is not as deep, other treatments may include freezing or burning it off, creams that help your loved one's immune system fight the cancer or make it difficult for the cancer cells to grow, and special light treatments³.

Looking After Your Loved One's Skin

After your loved one has had SCC, it's super important to keep an eye on your skin. This means going to the doctor for skin check-ups every year and learning how to check their own skin for anything new or changing³.

Protecting the skin from the sun is key! Wearing sunscreen, hats, and long sleeves, and trying to stay out of the sun when UV ray exposure is strongest is important¹. Remember, catching SCC early and protecting your loved one's skin from the sun can make a big difference!

References

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3. Combalia A, Carrera C. Squamous Cell Carcinoma: An Update on Diagnosis and Treatment. *Dermatol Pract Concept*. 2020;10(3):e2020066. Published 2020 Jun 29. doi:10.5826/dpc.1003a66