

Megan Hoang

Understanding Basal Cell Carcinoma: A Guide for Patients

Basal cell carcinoma is a very common type of skin cancer. In fact, it's the most common kind of all cancers. Roughly 1 out of every 5 people in the United States will get this skin cancer at some point in their lives. In the last 30 years, more and more people have been getting it.

Think of your skin as a team of cells that regularly replace themselves. Basal cell carcinoma happens when the cells that are supposed to make new skin don't do their job the right way and start growing too much.

This kind of cancer usually shows up as a see-through bump on the skin that might be shiny and might have tiny red lines that are actually blood vessels. If you have darker skin, the bump might look brown or black. It could also appear as a flat red spot, a tiny pink bump, or even as a waxy area that looks like a scar. These bumps or spots can get sore and bleed over time, and they may hurt, itch, or get infected. Basal cell carcinoma is often found on parts of your skin that get a lot of sun, like your face or neck. But it can also show up on areas that don't see much sun.

It's more likely to happen to men and older people, but anyone can get it. Spending a lot of time in the sun or in tanning beds can increase your risk, especially if you have light skin, have had skin cancer in your family, get sunburns easily, have had serious sunburns before, have been around radiation or arsenic, or have certain genetic conditions.

Luckily, basal cell carcinoma usually doesn't grow fast and it's not likely to spread to other parts of the body. If you catch it early, it's often easy to treat and doesn't cause much harm. But if you ignore it, it can grow and damage nearby areas like muscle or bone, which can affect your looks and cause pain or other problems. In very rare cases, it can spread and become more serious. Sometimes, even after treatment, it can come back, but that's not common.

Doctors can check for basal cell carcinoma by taking a small piece of the spot and looking at it under a microscope. Treatment usually involves surgery, but there are other options like radiation, freezing the spot, burning and scraping it, or using medicine to kill the cancer cells.

To lower your chances of getting basal cell carcinoma, try to stay out of the sun in the middle of the day, don't use tanning beds, wear sunscreen and clothes that cover your skin, and keep an eye on your skin for any changes. If you notice any new or odd spots, or if you have spots that bleed or won't heal, go see your doctor.

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Think of your loved one's skin as a team of cells that regularly replace themselves. Basal cell carcinoma happens when the cells that are supposed to make new skin don't do their job the right way and start growing too much.

This kind of cancer usually shows up as a see-through bump on the skin that might be shiny and might have tiny red lines that are actually blood vessels. If your loved one has darker skin, the bump might look brown or black. It could also appear as a flat red spot, a tiny pink bump, or even as a waxy area that looks like a scar. These bumps or spots can get sore and bleed over time, and they may hurt, itch, or get infected. Basal cell carcinoma is often found on parts of the skin that get a lot of sun, like the face or neck. But it can also show up on areas that don't see much sun.

It's more likely to happen to men and older people, but anyone can get it. Spending a lot of time in the sun or in tanning beds can increase their risk, especially if they have light skin, have had skin cancer in the family, get sunburns easily, have had serious sunburns before, have been around radiation or arsenic, or have certain genetic conditions.

Luckily, basal cell carcinoma usually doesn't grow fast and it's not likely to spread to other parts of the body. If it's caught early, it's often easy to treat and doesn't cause much harm. But if it's ignored, it can grow and damage nearby areas like muscle or bone, which can affect their looks and cause pain or other problems. In very rare cases, it can spread and become more serious. Sometimes, even after treatment, it can come back, but that's not common.

Doctors can check for basal cell carcinoma by taking a small piece of the spot and looking at it under a microscope. Treatment usually involves surgery, but there are other options like radiation, freezing the spot, burning and scraping it, or using medicine to kill the cancer cells.

To lower their chances of getting basal cell carcinoma, you can help them stay out of the sun in the middle of the day, avoid using tanning beds, wear sunscreen and clothes that cover the skin, and keep an eye on their skin for any changes. If you notice any new or odd spots on them, or if they have spots that bleed or won't heal, help them make an appointment with their doctor.