

SQUAMOUS CELL CARCINOMA

What is it?

Squamous cell carcinoma is a cancer that develops in the outermost portion of the skin, called the epidermis.

Who gets it?

Squamous cell carcinoma is the second most common type of skin cancer. Anyone with a substantial history of sun exposure can develop squamous cell carcinoma. Older people with fair skin and light eyes are at the highest risk. Also, people with occupations that require them to spend long hours outdoors or those who spend extensive leisure time in the sun are at high risk. Immunosuppressed individuals, especially organ transplant patients, develop squamous cell carcinomas.

What are the symptoms?

Squamous cell carcinoma can occur at any part of the body, including the mucous membranes, but are most common in areas that are chronically exposed to the sun; the face, ears, neck, bald scalp, back of hands, shoulders, arms, upper back and chest. Squamous cell carcinoma may itch, burn or bleed after minimal trauma. Squamous cell carcinoma may arise from a precancerous lesion known as an actinic keratosis, which appears as a rough, flat pink spot. Squamous cell carcinoma is usually raised above the normal skin surface and is firmer to the touch. Most early lesions are pink/red and flat with a fine scale or scab. As the tumor grows, it thickens and forms a firm, red bump that may develop an ulcer.

What is the treatment?

Most squamous cell carcinomas remain confined to the skin and are readily cured. Treatment options include electrodesiccation and curettage (the process of using a tool called a curette to scrape away cancerous cells and tissues as well as short, high frequency electric impulses to destroy any remaining cancerous cells and tissues), and standard surgical excision. Mohs micrographic surgery, a highly specialized technique, is the preferred treatment for some basal cell carcinomas. If left untreated, squamous cell carcinomas may eventually penetrate and destroy underlying tissues. In a small percentage of cases, the cancer may spread internally (metastasize) and have the potential to be fatal.

Self-care tips:

You can protect yourself by having regular skin exams to identify any suspicious-looking lesions before they progress too far. If you must spend time in the sun, make sure you are well protected with a broad-spectrum sunscreen of at least a SPF 30, a broad-rimmed hat, sunglasses and protective clothing.

For more information please visit our website: www.pennstatehershey.org/web/dermatology/home and click on Health Information Library.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your provider at the location you were treated.
Hershey Medical Center, UPC I, Suite 100 (717) 531-6820 or Nyes Road, (717) 657-4045.
Penn State Hershey Medical Group, Colonnade Building (814)272-4445.