

Skin Cancer Treatments

Treatment for skin cancer is different for each person. If you've been diagnosed with skin cancer, your treatment will depend on the type of skin cancer you have, how big and deep it is, and if it has spread to other parts of your body. Some people get one type of treatment. Other people might need more than one type of treatment. Talk to your health care team about what is best for you.



Surgery

Surgery is often used to treat skin cancer. It can help figure out if you have cancer, what type it is, and if it has spread. Surgery may be done to remove the cancer and to make the site where it was removed look better. The kind of surgery you might need depends on the type of skin cancer, how big it is, and where it is.

The most common side effects are pain, infection, and having a scar at the site of the surgery.



Radiation Therapy

Radiation uses high-energy rays (like x-rays) to kill cancer cells in a part of the body. Radiation can be used to treat cancer that's just on the skin or that has spread to other parts of the body.

The most common side effects are skin changes and hair loss where the radiation is given. Your skin may become red, swollen, flaky, or darker. You may also feel very tired.



Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy helps your immune system find and fight cancer. It may be given as a shot into a vein in your arm, or as pills or capsules that you take by mouth.

Side effects of immunotherapy depend on the type of medicine used to treat the skin cancer. You may feel tired, sick to your stomach, or have a fever, chills, or rashes. Side effects are usually mild but can be severe.



Targeted Therapy

Targeted therapy finds and attacks cancer cells while causing less harm to normal cells. These medicines change the way cancer cells grow, divide, or repair themselves. They are given by mouth as pills or capsules or might be given as a shot into a vein in your arm.

Targeted therapies cause different side effects depending on the medicine used. Some can affect the skin and cause rashes, dryness, and itching. Your skin may also be more likely to get a sunburn.



Local or Topical Treatments

Freezing, light therapy, or lasers may be used to treat some cancers. Other times, topical chemo or other drugs are used by rubbing them right on the skin. Local treatments are mostly used to treat basal and squamous cell skin cancers.

Each treatment has different side effects. Ask your doctor about what to expect.



Chemotherapy (chemo)

Chemo uses medicines to fight cancer. Most of the time, chemo is given as a shot into a vein in your arm. Or, chemo might be taken by mouth as a pill or capsule. Other times, it may be rubbed on the skin. When it's given as a pill or into a vein, chemo travels to most parts of the body to treat cancer that has spread. When it's put on the skin, it stays in the area where it's rubbed in to treat cancer in that spot.



Clinical Trials

Clinical trials test new medicines or treatments in people. They help doctors find better ways to treat cancer. If your doctor talks to you about a clinical trial, it's up to you whether to take part. And if you do sign up for a clinical trial, you can stop at any time.

Treatment may be different for each person with skin cancer. Before starting any treatment, ask your health care team what to expect. It is important to know how you will feel during and after treatment. That way, you can make the best choice for yourself.



For more information and answers, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/skincancer or call us at **1-800-227-2345**.