

Basal cell carcinoma

Skin Oncology Team Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about basal cell carcinomas of the skin. It tells you what they are, what causes them, what can be done about them and where you can find out more.

What is a basal cell carcinoma?

A basal cell carcinoma (BCC) is sometimes called a rodent ulcer and is the most common form of skin cancer. If detected and treated early, most BCCs can be cured.

A BCC grows very slowly and, unlike many other cancers, does not spread to other parts of the body. However, if no treatment is given, it will slowly destroy the surrounding skin and the area underneath. It is important that treatment is given otherwise it will spread in the local area. This can make removal and reconstruction much more difficult.

Who gets BCCs?

BCCs can affect any adult but people tend to be aged over 50. However, more people in their 30s and 40s are developing this form of skin cancer.

What are the symptoms of a BCC?

It is painless and can appear as an open sore (ulcer) or a slowly enlarging lump. This may bleed or form a crust but will not heal or disappear within two to three months. They can be present for anything from a few months to 10 to 15 years.

It can look like a flat, red patch that is rough, dry or scaly. It can also look like a small, smooth, shiny, waxy lump.

BCCs can be found anywhere on the body but are most likely to appear on areas where the skin is exposed to the sun such as your face, head and neck.

How are they treated?

Once a doctor has decided that an area of skin looks abnormal, some or all of the area will be removed to be examined under a microscope. This procedure is known as a biopsy and is usually carried out using a local anaesthetic so you are awake. It will usually be carried out in the Day Case Unit or outpatient clinic.

There are different treatments available and your consultant will discuss these with you. The treatment options will depend on many things such as:

- the size of the affected area and where it is
- how old you are
- what your general health is like
- whether you have had a BCC before

Possible treatments might include:

Surgery

Treatment of a BCC usually involves some surgery. Small lumps can be cut from the skin quickly and easily. Other, larger areas may need surgery that is more complicated, such as skin flaps or grafts. In these cases, you may need to stay in hospital overnight.

Radiotherapy

BCCs respond well to radiotherapy. Radiotherapy involves using low doses of radiation to destroy the cancer. The level of radiation involved is safe. The treatment is painless and only takes a few minutes. However, your skin may feel sore for a few weeks afterwards.

This treatment is normally given at The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust and you may need several visits to destroy all of the cancer cells.

Creams

Sometimes special creams can be used that interfere with the growth of abnormal cells. These creams may be used for between two to 12 weeks, depending on the type of cream.

Common side effects of these creams can include redness, flaking or peeling skin and itchiness. Less common and more serious side effects include blistering or ulceration of your skin. If your skin blisters or you develop ulcers after using it, wash the cream off and contact your GP.

Your consultant will discuss all the possible treatments fully with you and help you decide which is the best for you. If you are unsure or have any questions, ask the consultant or any member of the nursing staff who will be pleased to help you.

What are the benefits of the treatment?

Once the treatment is completed, your BCC should be gone completely, giving you peace of mind.

What are the risks?

The risks will depend on the type of treatment you choose. These will be discussed with you by your consultant when you are deciding which treatment to have.

General risks can include bleeding, scarring and infection after treatment. However, without treatment, your BCC will continue to grow.

What happens after treatment for a BCC?

The number of times you need to visit hospital will depend on the treatment you receive. Once the treatment is finished, you will be seen in an outpatient clinic to finally check the treated area. At this visit, we will give you advice on how to keep your skin healthy and what to look for if the condition comes back.

If you have had one or two BCCs, you will not need to see your consultant after the cancer is completely removed and healed, unless you get another BCC.

If you have had more than two BCCs in a short period of time, you will need to see your consultant regularly for at least two years. At this visit, we will check that all is still well.

How can I help myself?

As you have had a BCC, we know that you have sensitive skin. Please help yourself by:

- Examining the treated area every four to six weeks to check that the BCC has not returned. There is a low risk that you will get another BCC but it is best to check regularly.
- Check the rest of your body regularly for any changes to your skin or new growths, especially in areas exposed to the sun.
- Protect your skin from the sun. This is even more important now that you have been treated for skin cancer.

Remember:

If you are worried about new lumps or skin ulcers, see your GP. This is especially important if you have had an open sore or ulcer for over two months that does not heal, is bleeding or is getting bigger.

Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following organisations:

Macmillan Cancer Support

0808 808 00 00

Weblink:

<http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Cancerinformation/Cancertypes/Skin/Skincancer.aspx>

Cancer Research UK

0300 123 1022

Weblink:

<http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/sun-uv-and-cancer>

Let's Face It Support Network

01252 879630

14 Fallowfield, Yateley, Surrey, GU17 7LW

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Skin Oncology Team on 01384 456111 ext. 3088 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/oncology/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta brosură poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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