Screening and Prevention of Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States.

The most common types of skin cancer are **basal cell carcinoma** and **squamous cell carcinoma**, but the most serious type is **melanoma**. The main cause of skin cancer is exposure to sunlight. Sun exposure, especially sunburns, can cause skin damage that over time can lead to cancer.

**Pros and Cons of Screening for Skin Cancer**

The term screening means looking for a condition or illness in individuals who do not have specific symptoms or concerns related to that illness. Screening for skin cancer is done by a clinician who examines all of your skin for any abnormal moles or spots that you have not noticed yourself. This is sometimes called a "skin check."

One might naturally presume that screening would be beneficial, but the reality is that sometimes looking for problems when there are no symptoms can turn out to be harmful. Therefore, it is important to carefully weigh the pros and cons of screening. **In the case of skin cancer screening, experts are still unclear about whether or not the pros outweigh the cons.**

**Pros of screening** include earlier detection by finding moles or spots that were not previously noticed, which leads to earlier treatment. For the case of melanoma, detecting it very early decreases the chance of cancer complications and death. However, it is not clear whether screening finds skin cancers early enough to have an impact.

**Cons of screening** include false-positive findings of a suspicious spot or mole that turns out not to be cancer. This can result in unnecessary biopsies or surgery and may cause unnecessary worry and stress.

**Should You Get Screened for Skin Cancer?**

There is currently not enough evidence to say whether or not you should get screened for skin cancer if you do not have any skin symptoms.

**But if you do see something you are concerned about, such as a new or growing mole on your skin, you should talk to your doctor.**

**US Preventive Services Task Force Recommendation**

There is currently not enough evidence to say that you should or should not get screened for skin cancer if you do not have any skin symptoms or concerns.

**How Can You Reduce Your Risk of Skin Cancer?**

You can reduce your risk of getting skin cancer by
- Wearing sunscreen and reapplying it often
- Wearing a wide-brimmed hat, a long-sleeved shirt, and pants, especially during midday
- Avoiding tanning beds

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

US Preventive Services Task Force
www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/topic_search_results?topic_status=P

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