



Protecting Yourself from Skin Cancer

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Over 1 million new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed each year, making it the most common form of cancer in the United States. Thankfully, the large majority of these cases are treatable when detected early.

There are three types of skin cancer: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma.

Basal cell carcinoma is the most common form of cancer and usually appears as a sore that won't heal. Basal cell carcinomas generally will not spread and are easily treatable through minimally invasive means.

Squamous cell carcinomas may appear on a variety of organs, including the lips and mouth. They can start as a reddish, scaly bump that gradually enlarges and are slightly more likely than basal cell carcinoma to spread to other parts of the body.

Melanomas account for 75 percent of all deaths associated with skin cancer. They can occur anywhere on your body, including your palms, the soles of your feet and under your fingernails. Melanomas are highly treatable in their early stages when they remain localized, but once they spread, they are potentially fatal.

Overexposure to the sun is the number one cause of skin cancers, which usually appear on the hands, neck or face. Florida's sun-drenched environment can pose tremendous hazards unless you take the proper precautionary measures.

- Seek the shade, especially between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm
- Avoid sunburn
- Refrain from using tanning booths
- Use a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher every day
- Apply sunscreen to your entire body 30 minutes before going outside. Reapply every two hours.
- Wear clothing that covers arms and legs, as well as a broad-brimmed hat and UV-blocking sunglasses.
- Keep newborns out of the sun. Sunscreens should be used on babies over the age of six months.

In addition, you should take the time to perform a self-examination of your skin once monthly. Use a hand mirror to look for new growths or any changes in your skin, such as

lesions, reddish-brown and scaly patches, or abnormal moles. If you discover something questionable, consult your dermatologist as soon as possible.

When performing self-examination, you should refer to the following ‘**ABCDE**’ system of detection:

- **A**symmetrical skin lesion.
- **B**order of the lesion is irregular.
- **C**olor: melanomas usually have multiple colors.
- **D**iameter: moles greater than 6 mm are more likely to be melanomas
- **E**volution or **E**levation: The change that takes place within a mole or lesion, and the whether or not the mole is raised above the skin, may also constitute signs of a melanoma.

I perform detailed skin examinations for my patients on an annual basis, or twice yearly if they have a family history of skin cancer. If you have not received such an examination, I urge you to schedule an appointment today. Early detection saves lives.

Watson Clinic opened a dermatology practice in Zephyrhills at 6901 Medical View Lane in September. Dermatologist Rick L. Moore, MD, leads the office. Appointments with Dr. Moore may be scheduled by calling 813-788-7867.