

Basal Cell Carcinoma

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC) is a skin cancer that affects millions of people in the United States each year. While anyone can develop BCC, it usually occurs in light-skinned patients older than 40 years. Patients with history of repeated sun exposure are at risk for getting BCC. Other risk factors for BCC include light eyes and light hair, a history of blistering sunburns (particularly in childhood), or close relatives with skin cancer.

Basal cell carcinomas are considered slow-growing tumors that almost never metastasize (spread to other parts of the body). Untreated BCCs have the potential to continue to grow and destroy surrounding skin and nearby structures leading to physical deformity.

SYMPTOMS

The most common location of BCCs are the head and neck. They frequently look like a shiny pimple or pearly bump on the skin surface. There may be small blood vessels on or around this bump. Sometimes the bumps may erode and look like a scratched, crusted sore spot with a raised, rolled border. These cancers may bleed easily when bumped or irritated. Often these spots will not heal on their own.

DIAGNOSIS

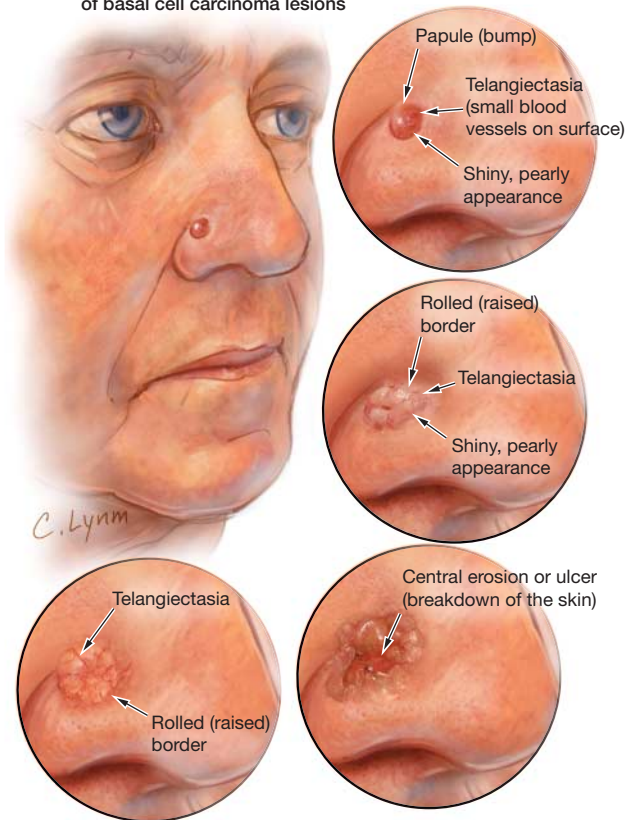
If a BCC is suspected, a physician will take a small sample (skin biopsy) so that it can be examined under the microscope. The biopsy requires local anesthesia (numbing medicine) and is usually painless, healing with a tiny scar at the biopsy site.

TREATMENT

The key to treatment is to ensure that there is no more cancer left in the skin. The treatments available for BCC include cryotherapy (freezing the cancer), topical chemotherapy (a destructive cream put on the spot), curettage and electrodesiccation (scraping and burning), photodynamic therapy (using special creams and targeted light to destroy the cancer), surgical excision (cutting it out), Mohs micrographic surgery (a specialized type of surgery indicated for certain BCCs), and irradiation (x-ray destruction of the BCC). The size, location on the body, microscopic pattern of the tumor, and other factors (such as whether the tumor returned after prior treatment) will affect the choice of treatment.

Patients who develop a BCC are at increased risk for getting additional BCCs. When detected early, BCCs are easier to treat. Monthly self-skin examinations and regular skin checks with your physician are important. Decrease the risk of BCC by protecting your skin with regular sunscreen use and avoiding excess sun exposure and tanning beds.

Typical appearances and characteristics of basal cell carcinoma lesions



FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Skin Cancer Foundation: <http://www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/basal-cell-carcinoma>

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