

Department of plastic surgery

# Basal cell carcinoma

## What is basal cell carcinoma?

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC) is also known as rodent ulcer. It is the most common type of skin cancer in white-skinned people. It usually occurs on sun-exposed areas of skin in the middle-aged and elderly, but it may grow on any area of skin and can occur in younger people. It is slow growing.

BCC develops as a skin lesion or sore that does not heal. It can appear as a red and rough patch, with scabs or ulcers or a small swelling. Basal cell carcinoma is locally malignant, which means that it does not spread to other organs of the body. However, if it is not treated adequately it can grow locally and destroy the surrounding area. BCC is very rarely life-threatening but can be disfiguring.

When detected early, BCC is easily curable. Various treatment options are available, such as creams (topical chemotherapy), freezing (cryotherapy), curettage (scraping), surgery, radiotherapy, Mohs' micrographic surgery, and exposure to special light (photodynamic therapy) or laser treatment. Your doctor will explain these treatments and advise you about which one is suitable for you.

Once the lesion is completely removed, no further treatment is needed. In a small number of cases it may recur or a new lesion may develop.

BCC is thought to be caused by damage to the skin by ultra violet radiation contained in sunlight. To prevent further new lesions you must take the following steps:

- Examine your skin regularly and seek medical advice for any lesion that does not heal in six weeks.
- Protect your skin from ultraviolet radiation in strong sunlight:
  - Avoid exposure to the sun.
  - Cover up with loose fitting but closely woven clothes.
  - Wear a wide brimmed hat and protective sunglasses.
  - Use a high SPF sunscreen (15 or more). When choosing a sunscreen, look for one to protect against UVB, and the UVA circle logo and/or 4 or 5 UVA stars to protect against UVA. Apply plenty of sunscreen 15 to 30 minutes before going out in the sun, and reapply every two hours and straight after swimming and towel-drying.
  - Avoid tanning under sunlamps.



## Further information

- Your doctor
- Macmillan Cancer Support has information on all aspects of cancer  
Freephone **0808 808 00 00**, open Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm.  
Lines answered by specialist nurses  
[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)
- British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons  
[www.bapras.org.uk](http://www.bapras.org.uk).

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact [patient.information@christie.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@christie.nhs.uk)

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for  
urgent support and specialist advice  
**The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658**  
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

