

Department of plastic surgery

Basal cell carcinoma (cancer)

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 light-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, left untreated it can grow locally and destroy the surrounding area. BCC is very rarely life-threatening but can affect your appearance.

When detected early, BCC is easily curable. Various treatment options are available, such as creams (topical chemotherapy), freezing (cryotherapy), curettage (scraping), surgery, radiotherapy, 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.

You will not need further treatment for the lesion once it is completely removed. 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 6 weeks
- protect your skin from ultraviolet radiation in strong sunlight:
 - avoid excessive 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 (50 or more). Choose a sunscreen that protects against UVB, and has 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 2 hours and straight after swimming and towel-drying
 - avoid sunbeds



Contacts

If you have any concerns or questions, ring:

Skin cancer specialist nursing team: **0161 918 7587**

Further information

Macmillan Cancer Support has information on all aspects of cancer

Freephone **0808 808 0000**, 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week

Lines answered by specialist nurses

www.macmillan.org.uk

British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons

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.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham, Salford or Macclesfield. 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