

Skin Cancer Signs and Prevention

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May is Skin Cancer Awareness Month! We wanted to help you be more aware of the different kinds of skin cancer and how it can affect your feet. Skin cancer is a general term for three distinct cancers that can appear on the foot: melanoma, basal cell carcinoma, and squamous cell carcinoma.

Basal cell carcinoma, the most common type of skin cancer, appears on sun-exposed areas as a smooth, raised bump or a sore that is not healing. It rarely metastasizes or causes death because it grows slowly and rarely spreads. It is easily treated with surgery or radiation.

Squamous cell carcinoma appears on sun-exposed areas as thick, red, scaly patches or as a bleeding ulcer. It is more serious than basal cell carcinoma because in some instances, it may spread to other areas of the body.

Melanoma, the most serious skin cancer, begins in the cells of the skin that produce pigmentation (coloration) and spreads to other areas of the body as it grows beneath the surface of the skin. It is often also called malignant melanoma, because it spreads to other areas of the body as it grows beneath the skin. People of all ages can get melanoma, even while they are young. Melanoma can happen anywhere on the body, even on areas that have not been exposed to the sun.

The members of the American College Foot and Ankle Surgeons warn that melanoma is the most common malignancy on the foot or ankle and more likely to be misdiagnosed than melanoma on any other part of the body. A study published in *The Journal of Foot & Ankle Surgery* reported the overall survival rate for melanoma of the foot or ankle is just 52 percent, in sharp contrast to the 85 percent survival rate for patients with melanomas on other areas of the body.

Even though Americans are more diligent than ever in protecting their bodies from the growing threat of malignant melanoma, they are overlooking the most misdiagnosed and fatal site of the disease—their feet.

Melanoma can be found on any area of the foot or ankle, even under a toenail. Often, it appears as an abnormal mole or small area of pigmented skin. A huge problem with melanoma on the foot or ankle is it is often unnoticed in the early stages when it is more easily treated. Usually when it is finally diagnosed, it is already in the advanced stages which contributes to the higher mortality rate. If you notice any change in an existing mole or pigmented skin, you should make an appointment with your podiatrist as soon as possible.

CAUSE

Melanoma is caused by too much exposure to UV rays from the sun or tanning beds. While anyone can get melanoma, there are a few things that put you at higher risk:

- Blonde or Red Hair, Fair Skin, or Skin that Freckles Easily
- Getting a sunburn that produces blisters when under the age of 18
- Having many moles, especially that appeared at a young age

SIGNS TO WATCH OUT :

- Spots on the skin that are brown, black, blue, red, or white. However, remember that not all areas of discoloration are melanoma.
- Asymmetry- Half of the spot is different in shape than the other
- Border- Edge of the spot is ragged, notched, or blurred
- Color- A mix of colors rather than one solid color
- Diameter- Moles remain small, melanoma grows. A spot larger than a pencil eraser needs to be examined by your Podiatrist.

- Discolored Toenails- Unless the discoloration was caused by a trauma, a discolored toenail needs to be seen by your Podiatrist.

PREVENTION:

- Cover up your feet with water shoes or shoes and socks when in the sun.
- Inspect all areas of your feet daily including the soles, toenails, and in between toes.
- Use adequate sunscreen on exposed skin including the tops and bottoms of your feet.
- Avoid being in the sun during the peak hours of 10 a.m – 4 p.m., especially for kids.
The sun is especially damaging to children and teens.
- Wear sunglasses that block 100% of UVA and UVB rays
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat to limit exposure.

Some content provided by The ACFAS.

Early detection is vital with skin cancer. If you notice any of these signs or changes on your feet or ankles, contact Dr. Kylin Kovac or Dr. Jed Erickson for an evaluation. Dr. Kovac & Dr. Erickson are Doctors of Podiatry Medicine and Foot and Ankle Surgeons. They have the education and experience to correctly diagnose foot and ankle problems, and can provide the individualized treatment plan that will be the best for you.