

Introduction

The commonest cause of skin cancer is prolonged sunlight exposure particularly in the early years of life. Skin cancers will not go away but will grow destroying healthy tissue and possibly spread to other parts of the body. Treatment usually involves surgery, although in selected cases radiotherapy may be suitable. During surgery, a margin of normal tissue around the lesion will also need to be excised to minimize the chance of leaving behind small portions of the lesion that are not visible to the naked eye. The defect will therefore be larger than the tumour, and may be closed by a variety of means familiar to a qualified Plastic and Reconstructive surgeon.

The Operation / Procedure

1. This procedure is performed under local anaesthesia in operating theatre. The drug will work quickly to numb pain but you will still feel some pushing and pulling; please advise the surgeon if you experience any discomfort or stress. You may hear buzzing noises associated with the instrument that is used to stop bleeding.
2. The margin of the cancer and a surrounding narrow rim of normal tissue are marked with ink before the injection. The skin is cut as marked and the cancer is lifted off the deeper tissue as indicated by the thickness.
3. Your surgeon may decide, after discussion with you, for an immediate check on the completeness of the surgery. This requires that the specimen is sent away to a laboratory for examination under microscope and takes about an hour. You will need to wait for the result before the wound is closed.
4. If the defect is small, it may be suitable to be closed directly with sutures. Larger defects may need tissues borrowed from 'spare' skin next to the defect ('local flap') or a thin slice of tissue from further away ('skin graft'). Your surgeon will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Preoperative Preparation

1. You may be required to stop medicines that increase the risk of bleeding such as anticoagulants; this includes some herbal or traditional medicines. You should tell your doctor about every medication that you are taking.
2. A written consent is required.
3. Generally investigations are not required unless there is evidence that the cancer has spread elsewhere.

Postoperative Instruction

1. You may have either a dressing or a layer of ointment over the wound. Please listen to any specific postoperative instructions given to you on wound care.
2. You should inform the nurse if any blood oozes from the wound.

Common Risks and Complications (not all possible complications are listed)

1. Scarring is inevitable though your surgeon will do their best to minimize it.
2. Bleeding and infection may occur but not commonly.
3. There is a small chance of excision being incomplete and further treatment may be necessary.

Things to take note on discharge

1. You can usually be discharged home the same day.
2. You should rest and avoid exertion for the rest of the day. You should try to sit up and sleep with your head propped up to reduce any swelling.
3. If blood oozes, you should be able to stop bleeding with firm pressure with a clean gauze for ten minutes.
4. Come back to the hospital or visit your nearest Accident and Emergency department, if bleeding does not stop, or there are increased pain or swelling.
5. During your follow-up visit, your surgeon will check your wound and discuss the results of surgery, including any need for further treatment.

Follow Up

1. Your doctor will suggest and arrange adjuvant therapy, e.g. Chemotherapy, Hormonal therapy, Target therapy and Radiotherapy after receiving your pathology report and according to your medical condition.
2. Follow up is necessary to detect recurrences and the occurrence of additional cancers.
3. Sunlight is an important cause of skin cancers and thus prevention or at least reduction of risk of further comes from taking care to reduce exposure to the sun, particularly when you are very young. A tan is not 'healthy'; it is evidence of damaged skin. Do not sun-bathe or use sun-beds, avoid sun exposure during midday and protect yourself with long sleeve clothing, caps, umbrellas and sun block, at least SPF 15, everyday.

Remarks

This is general information only and the list of complications is not exhaustive. Other unforeseen complications may occasionally occur. In special patient groups, the actual risk may be different. For further information please contact your doctor. Evangel Hospital reserves the right to amend this leaflet without prior notice. We welcome suggestions or enquiries on the information provided in this leaflet. Please contact our Healthcare professionals so that we could follow up and make improvement.

Reference

Hospital Authority: "Skin Cancer" (2023)

Smart Patient: <https://www21.ha.org.hk/smartpatient/SPW/en-US/Disease-Information/Disease/?guid=6b20d18a-b883-4400-a81c-c0154be67ce7> (25-07-2023)