Bowen’s disease
Information for patients
Introduction

You have been given a diagnosis of Bowen’s disease. This leaflet is designed to provide further information about your diagnosis and treatment options.

What is Bowen’s disease?

Bowen’s disease is a common skin condition usually beginning in later life. It appears as a red scaly patch, 1cm to 3cm in diameter, on an exposed site, most commonly the lower legs. Sometimes there may be more than one patch.

How is it caused?

Bowen’s disease is thought to develop as a result of long-term sun exposure but may develop many years after exposure to arsenic or engineering oils. You cannot pass it on to others.

The patches grow very slowly and can last for many years. They may occasionally be a nuisance but generally do not cause any serious harm. Occasionally they can develop into a skin cancer (in less than 10% of people) that will require removal under local anaesthetic. You or your doctor would recognise this if the patch begins to grow quickly, bleed or form an ulcer.

How is Bowen’s disease diagnosed?

Bowen’s disease is often diagnosed by its appearance to the naked eye. The diagnosis may also be confirmed by taking a sample and examining it under the microscope.
**Treatment options**

Bowen’s disease can be cured with a variety of treatments including freezing, scraping, surgical removal or with a special cream. If the patch is not troublesome, however, the doctor may simply suggest that it is kept under observation.

**Self-help**

It is worthwhile protecting the skin from the sun once you have Bowen’s disease and you should wear a sunscreen or a hat daily during the summer months (even on dull days as the sun’s rays still get through the clouds). Thick tights, trousers and long skirts in women are also helpful to protect the legs.

Make sure you check for changes in the appearance of your patches and report any growth, bleeding or ulceration immediately to your doctor.

**Further information**

**British Association of Dermatologists**
Willan House
4 Fitzroy Square
London W1T 5HQ
Tel: 0207-383-0266
http://www.bad.org.uk/patients/leaflets/bowens.asp

**How to contact us**

If you have any questions or would like further advice about skin cancer, you can speak with our Macmillan Clinical Nurse Specialist, Heidi Waite, on:

01856 228233 (Monday to Friday 8am - 4pm)
If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221473 or email PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk

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