

Department of Dermatology

Basal cell carcinoma

Information for patients



You have been given a diagnosis of basal cell carcinoma (also known as rodent ulcer or basal cell epithelioma). This leaflet has been written to give you further information about your diagnosis and treatment options.

What is a basal cell carcinoma (BCC)?

Basal cell carcinoma is the commonest type of skin cancer, usually beginning in later life. BCCs usually appear on the face, they don't often appear elsewhere. They occur most commonly in fair-skinned people who have blue eyes, red hair, freckles and a tendency to burn in the sun. People who have lived or worked abroad in a sunny place, have worked outdoors or enjoy outdoor hobbies are most at risk. It may take many years before BCCs appear and they usually affect people who are over the age of 40.

BCCs appear in a variety of ways, most commonly as a small flesh-coloured lump that gradually grows in size. The surface may become broken and frequently forms a small ulcer.

Sometimes BCCs appear as a scaly patch, particularly on the back and, rarely, they can look like a scar. If left for many years they can become large, but they do not spread to other parts of the body and do not pose any threat to your health whatsoever. However, if they are left they may damage nearby features, such as the eyelid or nose.

How are they diagnosed?

The doctor will be able to recognise a BCC by its appearance. The diagnosis may also be confirmed by removing it and examining it under a microscope.

Treatment options

BCCs can easily be treated with a variety of methods, including surgical removal, scraping, freezing or X-ray therapy. Occasionally they can recur in the scar following treatment and appear as an ulcer or nodule after the wound has healed.

Preventing future problems

Protecting your skin from the sun may help to prevent more BCCs. Clothing, sunhats and sunscreen during the summer months may offer some protection for your skin (even on dull days, as the sun's rays still get through the clouds). Ask your doctor or nurse for further information about sun protection and let them know if you have any questions.

Further information

Maggie's Cancer Information Centre

This Centre is based at the Churchill Hospital and provides information, guidance and support to anyone affected by cancer.

Tel: **01865 751 882**

Website: **www.maggiescentre.org.uk**

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:

Tel: **01856 228 233**

(Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 4.00pm)

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

Authors: Dr Richard Turner and Dr Emily Ryder
Department of Dermatology
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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Oxford OX3 9DU
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information

