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BIOPSY & EXCISION OF LESIONS

Skin cancer diagnosis

Your doctor will first look at the suspicious spot, mole or freckle. If they suspect skin cancer, a biopsy will most likely be done to confirm the diagnosis.

A biopsy is a quick and simple procedure. The doctor will give you a local anaesthetic and cut out the spot. This is usually done using a biopsy punch which is like a leather punch or a cookie cutter. It leaves a neat circular hole which usually heals well without needing a stitch. It generally doesn't scar.

The tissue that is cut out will be sent to a laboratory where a pathologist will examine it under a microscope. It will probably take at least a week for the results of your tests to be ready. This waiting period can be an anxious time. The results from your biopsy will help work out the treatment options.

Treatment

There are a number of ways to treat skin cancer. Your doctor will need to consider several factors when deciding the best treatment for you, including the type of skin cancer you have, the size and location of the skin cancer and whether it has spread to other parts of the body.

Treatment options for skin cancer include surgical removal of the tumour and surrounding tissue, scraping (curettage), burning (diathermy/cautery) and radiation.

If skin cancer is detected early, it is likely that removing the cancer is all that is needed. The earlier skin cancer is diagnosed, the less invasive, and more successful, any treatment is likely to be.

Treating non-melanoma skin cancer

More than 99% of people with basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma are cured. These cancers are often self-detected and are usually removed in doctors' surgeries.

Treating melanoma

Melanomas are almost always removed by surgery. Treatment for melanoma is most effective when the cancer is found and treated in its early stages, when it is still confined to the epidermis (the top or outer layer of skin).