

About

BCC is a type of skin cancer. Skin cancers can be divided into two main types, melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer. BCC is a non-melanoma skin cancer and the most common type of all skin cancers.

Most BCCs are caused by UV exposure (from sun or sunbeds). They can occur anywhere on the body but usually in more heavily sun-exposed areas. While more common in fair-skinned people they can occur in darker skin types as well.

They can have a variety of appearances from a permanent flat pink/red patch on the skin (superficial BCCs), to a pearly lump (nodular BCC) or even a scar-like area (aggressive subtype BCCs) that can be very difficult to see without an experienced doctor and the use of dermoscopy. Most are painless but can sometimes itch or bleed or just appear as a scab that doesn't heal.

People who have had one BCC are highly likely to grow further BCCs and are also at high risk for growing a potentially life-threatening melanoma.

Treatment

While BCCs are typically slow growing and practically never life threatening they can grow large, ulcerate and bleed, and invade local tissues, so do require treatment. This is most commonly a surgical excision (cutting out with some clear skin around it) under local anaesthetic.

Some suitable superficial BCCs may however be treated with a cream called imiquimod or by cryosurgery (freezing).

The best chance of a simple cure is to diagnose and treat them when they are small in size.

Prevention

It is important to do regular self skin checks, take careful UV protection measures and have long-term annual skin checks by a doctor experienced in skin cancer diagnosis.

Further information can be found at

www.dermnetnz.org/topics/basal-cell-carcinoma