



Melanoma Fact Sheet

The Disease^{1,2}

- Melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer, is characterized by the uncontrolled growth of pigment-producing cells, or melanocytes.
- Melanoma usually develops in the skin (cutaneous melanoma), but may also occur in the:
 - Eyes (ocular or intraocular melanoma)
 - Membrane covering the brain and spinal cord (meninges)
 - Digestive tract
 - Lymph nodes
 - Other areas where melanocytes are found
- Most melanomas (more than 70 percent) begin in or near an existing mole or dark spot on the skin. Some "birthmarks" (congenital moles) can also develop into melanomas.

Key Statistics

- There has been a steady increase in melanoma incidence worldwide, primarily attributed to increased sun exposure.²
- Cancer of the skin (basal cell, squamous cell and malignant melanoma) is the most common type of cancer, accounting for more than 50 percent of all cancers.³
- Melanoma accounts for about four percent of skin cancer cases but causes a large majority of skin cancer deaths.³
- It is estimated that about 60,000 new cases of melanoma will be diagnosed in the United States during 2007, and over 8,000 patients will die of the disease.³
- Approximately 160,000 people worldwide were diagnosed with melanoma in 2002, and more than 40,000 of them died from the disease.²
- Since 1973, the mortality rate for melanoma has increased by 50 percent.³
- About five percent of patients with melanoma will develop a second melanoma in their lifetime, while others may develop metastases from the original tumor.

Risk Factors and Symptoms^{1,2,3}

- Risk factors for melanoma include:
 - Dysplastic nevi (atypical mole)
 - Many (more than 50) moles
 - Fair skin
 - Freckles
 - Weakened immune system

- Excessive exposure to ultraviolet rays, radiation and sun, or excessive use of tanning beds
 - Age (Although melanoma is less related to aging than most other cancers, it is still more likely to occur in older people)
 - Gender (men are more likely to develop melanoma than women)
 - Family or personal history of melanoma/skin cancer
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- The first sign of melanoma is often a change in the size, shape, color, or feel of an existing mole.
 - Most melanomas have a black or blue-black area.
 - Melanoma also may appear as a new, black, or abnormal-looking mole.

Treatment

- Melanoma can be resected successfully if detected at an early stage. If not, it may spread to other parts of the body and result in death.¹
- The course of treatment for melanoma depends largely on the thickness of the primary tumor and the stage of the disease at diagnosis, as well as the patient's age and general health.^{3,4}
- Surgery is currently the first line of treatment for any stage of melanoma. In later stages, surgery is generally followed by chemotherapy, radiation therapy or immunotherapy (Interferon and Interleukin).
- Melanoma that has spread to other parts of the body (metastatic) is rarely curable with standard therapy.⁴
- Only 18 percent of patients with stage IV melanoma and 48 percent with stage III melanoma are alive five years after the diagnosis.³

References:

¹ American Melanoma Foundation Web site. Available at: <http://www.melanomafoundation.org/>. Accessed April 10, 2007.

² Ferlay J, et al., GLOBOCAN 2002. Cancer Incidence, Mortality and Prevalence Worldwide. IARC CancerBase No.5, Version 2.0. IARC Press, Lyon, 2004. Available at: <http://www-dep.iarc.fr>. Accessed April 10, 2007.

³ American Cancer Society Web site. Available at: <http://www.cancer.org/>. Accessed April 10, 2007.

⁴ National Cancer Institute Web site. Available at: <http://www.cancer.gov/>. Accessed April 10, 2007.

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