

Skin Cancer

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In Hong Kong, the incidence of skin cancer has increased by almost 100% in the past 10 years. The three most common skin cancers are basal cell carcinoma (BCC), squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), collectively known as non-melanoma skin cancers, (NMSC) & melanoma.

Although not all skin cancers are sun-related, exposure to ultraviolet radiation and skin type are the two most important aetiologic factors of skin cancers. Importance of adequate sun protection should be made known to general public.

Important features of skin cancers in Hong Kong include:

1. Rapidly rising incidence, especially non-melanoma skin cancer,
2. In local Chinese, pigmented BCC (~ 60%) is the commonest clinical type of BCC. On the contrary, pigmented type is the rarest type of BCC in Caucasians (~ 2%),
3. Because pigmented BCC clinically resembles melanoma, differential diagnoses of suspicious pigmented skin tumour in local Chinese population must include pigmented BCC in addition to cutaneous melanoma,
4. About 50-60% of cutaneous melanoma in local Chinese occur on the feet (acral lentiginous type), compared with less than 2% in most Caucasians studies. Therefore, be careful with pigmented skin lesions over feet and toes, especially those which exhibit suspicious signs and symptoms as described below for melanoma.



non-melanoma skin cancers (NMSC)

Comments

- 80% of skin cancer are preventable by protecting skin from UV exposure.
- 80% of UV damage to skin occurs before age 18, thus start protection early.
- A few episodes of sunburn already increase the risk of developing melanoma, the most lethal form of skin cancer.
- With repeated blistering sunburns for two times, the relative risk of developing melanoma subsequently is 1.7.
- With repeated blistering sunburns for three times - the relative risk of developing melanoma subsequently is 3.8.

(Relative risk refers to the increased risk for persons with the risk factor as compared with persons without the risk factor. If relative risk is 1, there is no increased risk)



Primary prevention

- Seek shade when appropriate.
- Avoid prolonged outdoor activities between 11am-3pm when the Ultraviolet (UV) ray is most damaging especially between May and September.
- Should avoid outdoor activities during midday hours in summer months as UV radiation is usually most intense.
- When participating outdoor activities, wear protective clothing, such as long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses, where possible.
- When swimming under the sun, generously apply sunscreen to all exposed skin with Sun Protection Factor (SPF) 15 or above and PA ++ or above that provides broad-spectrum protection from both UV B and UVA.
- Apply the sunscreen about 30 minutes before sun exposure. Be sure to use enough quantity for adequate protection.
- Re-apply sunscreen every 2 hours when staying out-doors for a long time, or after one has got wet through swimming or sweating.
- Sunscreen should never be used to prolong the duration of excessive sun exposure.
- Do not undertake indoor tanning.



Comments

- Non-melanoma skin cancers NMSCs include basal cell carcinoma (BBC) & squamous cell carcinoma (SCC).
- Most cases of BCC and SCC can be completely cured by surgical excision or radiotherapy.
- People who were previously heavily sun-exposed & people with fair skin, poor tanning ability and predisposition to sunburn are at increased risk.

Early detection of Non-melanoma skin cancers

- Sore that tends to bleed or crust over but fails to heal.
- In local Chinese, pigmented BCC is the commonest type of BCC, which resembles melanoma clinically.
- Majority of local SCC patients present as either chronic ulcerated lesions or hyperkeratotic lesions with or without erosion.
- BCC & SCC appear most frequently on sun-exposed head and neck region in local population.

Comments

- Melanoma is a highly malignant cutaneous neoplasm.
- Predisposing factors include excessive ultraviolet irradiation (which can be cumulative or due to episodes of intense and brief severe sunburn), pre-existing naevus and family history of skin cancers.
- In Asians, it is more common at soles, palms, nail beds or mucous membrane.



Early detection of Melanoma

Suspicious symptoms of an ordinary pigmented lesion that may turn malignant include:

- Rapidly increasing size
- Itch
- Inflammation and pain
- Bleeding
- Ulceration
- Variation in colour
- Satellite lesions

Suspicious signs include ABCDE:

- A Asymmetry
- B Border irregularity
- C Colour variation
- D Diameter > 6mm
- E Enlargement



Asymmetry



Border irregularity



Colour variation



Diameter > 6mm



Enlargement