

Skin Cancer Removal



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
PLASTIC SURGEONS®

What is Skin Cancer Removal?

Skin cancer removal is a procedure that involves removing cancerous cells from the skin. This is done to prevent the cancer from spreading to other parts of the body and to promote healing. The exact method of removal depends on the type and location of the cancer, as well as the patient's individual needs.

Regardless of the method used, the goal of skin cancer removal is to completely remove the cancer while preserving as much healthy tissue as possible. After the procedure, the wound will be closed and the patient will be monitored closely to ensure proper healing.

After skin cancer removal, scarring is a common concern for many patients. While it's true that some scarring may occur, the amount and visibility of the scar will depend on several factors, including the size and location of the cancer, the technique used for removal, and the individual's healing process.

Your plastic surgeon can discuss scar minimization techniques with you and help you understand what to expect in terms of scarring after skin cancer removal. With proper care and follow-up, many patients are able to achieve a satisfactory cosmetic outcome.

Mohs surgery

Skin cancer can be like an iceberg. What is visible on the skin surface sometimes is only a small portion of the growth. Beneath the skin, the cancerous cells cover a much larger region and there are no defined borders. In these cases, a specialized technique called Mohs surgery may be recommended.

During Mohs surgery, your plastic surgeon will remove the cancer layer by layer. After each layer of tissue is excised, it is examined under a microscope by a pathologist to determine if there are still cancerous cells present. If so, the surgeon will remove another layer. When the pathologist confirms that no more cancer cells are detected, your plastic surgeon can then close the wound.

This careful, stepped approach allows your plastic surgeon to ensure that only cancerous sections are removed and healthy tissue is preserved. It can improve the success rate of the procedure and minimize the risk of recurrence.



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Consultation & Preparation

The first step in treating skin cancer is a consultation with a plastic surgeon. The success and safety of your skin cancer surgery depends very much on your complete candidness during your consultation. You'll be asked a number of questions about your health, desires, and lifestyle.

During your consultation be prepared to discuss:

- Your type of skin cancer
- Medical conditions, family history, drug allergies, and medical treatments
- Your current medications and drug allergies; any vitamins or herbal supplements you take; and any alcohol, tobacco, vaping, or drug use
- Previous surgeries
- The likely outcomes of your treatment and any risks or potential complications

Your surgeon will also:

- Evaluate your general health status and any pre-existing health conditions or risk factors
- Examine your skin
- Take photographs
- Discuss your options
- Recommend a course of treatment
- Discuss likely outcomes of surgery and any risks or potential complications

Prior to surgery, you may be asked to:

- Have a physical examination, including lab work
- Obtain skin imaging studies depending on your personal or family history or age
- Take certain medications or adjust your current medications
- Stop smoking or vaping*
- Avoid taking aspirin and certain anti-inflammatory drugs, as they can increase bleeding



Skin cancer removal surgery may be performed in an accredited outpatient facility, an ambulatory surgical center, or a hospital.

If your procedure is performed with any sedation, make sure to arrange for someone to drive you to and from surgery and to stay with you for at least the first night following surgery.

*Smoking decreases blood flow, which can impede wound healing and increase the risk of infection. Be sure to ask your plastic surgeon questions. It's very important to understand all aspects of your skin cancer removal, especially regarding your personal health history. It's natural to feel some anxiety, whether it's excitement for your anticipated new look or a bit of preoperative stress. Don't be shy about discussing these feelings with your plastic surgeon.

The Procedure

Depending on the size, type, and location of the lesion, there are many ways to remove skin cancer and reconstruct your appearance if necessary.

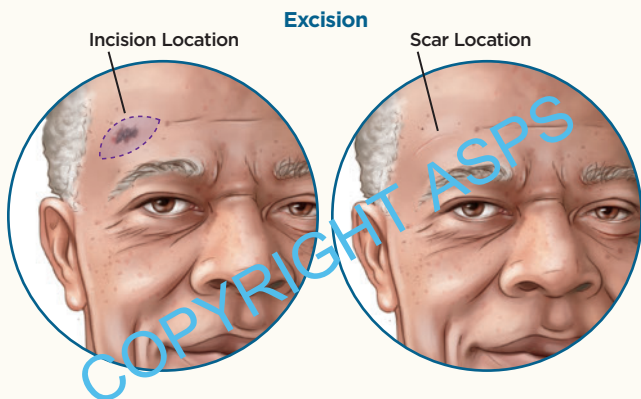
Anesthesia

Medications are administered for your comfort during the surgical procedures. The choices include local, intravenous sedation, and general anesthesia.

Your doctor will recommend the best choice for you.

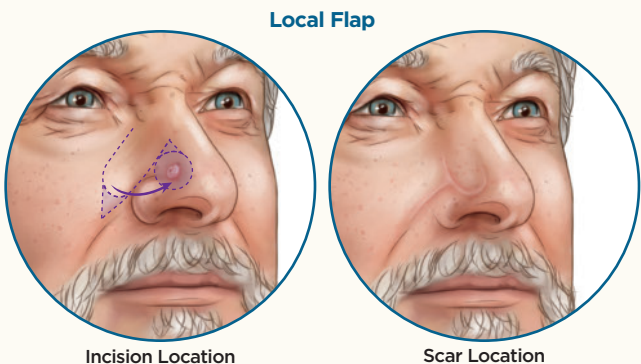
Option 1 - Excision

A small or contained lesion may be removed with excision – a simple surgical process to remove the lesion from the skin. Closure is most often performed in conjunction with excision.

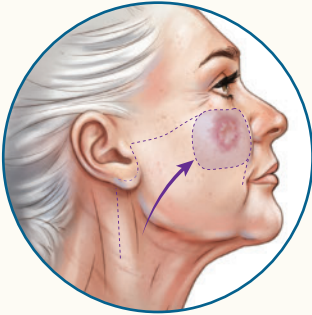


Option 2 - Flap Reconstruction

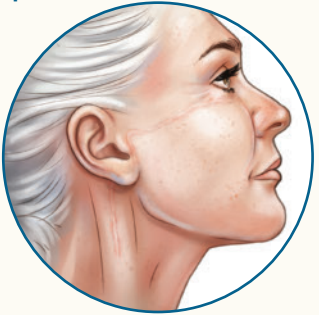
A skin cancer lesion that is particularly large, is being removed with frozen sections or is likely to cause disfigurement may be reconstructed with a local flap. Healthy, adjacent tissue is repositioned over the wound. The suture line is positioned to follow the natural creases and curves of the face if possible, to minimize the obviousness of the resulting scar.



Cervicofacial Flap



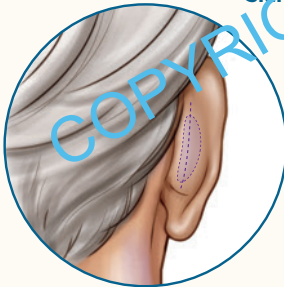
Incision Location



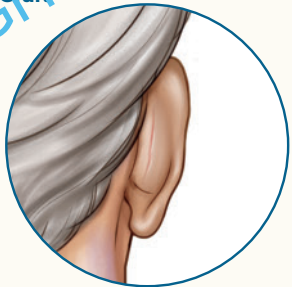
Scar Location

Option 3 - Skin Graft

Your surgeon may choose to treat your wound with a skin graft instead of a local flap. A skin graft is a thin bit of skin removed from one area of the body and relocated to the wound site.



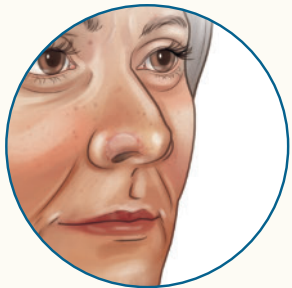
Incision Location



Scar Location



Incision Location



Graft Location

After your skin cancer has been removed and any primary reconstruction is completed, a dressing or bandages will be applied to your incisions.

Risks & Safety

When faced with skin cancer surgery, you will have to decide if the risks and potential complications are acceptable. You will be asked to sign consent forms to ensure that you fully understand the procedure.



Risks can include:

- Allergies to tape, suture materials and glues, blood products, topical preparations, or injected agents
- Anesthesia risks
- Excessive bleeding
- Change in skin sensation
- Damage to deeper structures – such as nerves, blood vessels, muscles – can occur and may be temporary or permanent
- Infection
- Poor healing of incisions
- Possibility of revision surgery
- Recurrence of skin cancer
- Systemic spread of skin cancer

All risks will be fully discussed prior to your consent. It is important that you address all your questions directly with your plastic surgeon.

Other important considerations:

Skin grafts have an added risk that the graft may not “take” and therefore additional surgery may be necessary to close the wound.

Preserve your health:

After being diagnosed with skin cancer, it’s important to be aware that you are at a higher risk for developing another skin cancer in the future. Skin cancer can also recur, so it’s crucial to discuss any signs of skin cancer with your physician, perform regular self-examinations for suspicious lesions, and schedule an annual skin cancer screening to catch any potential issues early.

Recovery & Results

Following your skin cancer surgery, incision sites may be sore, red, or drain small amounts of fluid. In general, you can expect some mild discomfort, swelling, and bruising around the surgical site.

- It is important to follow all wound care instructions such as cleansing and applying topical medications exactly as directed
- You will be able to return to light activity as instructed by your surgeon
- Make certain to keep your incision sites clean and well protected from potential injury
- Try to limit movement that may stress your wound and your sutures

Be sure to ask your plastic surgeon specific questions about what you can expect during your individual recovery period.

- What medication will I be given or prescribed after surgery?
- Will I have dressings/bandages after surgery?
- When will they be removed?
- Are stitches removed? When?
- When can I resume normal activity and exercise?
- When do I return for follow-up care?
- How long will it take before healing is complete?

Recovery after skin cancer removal surgery will depend on the type and extent of the procedure. Your plastic surgeon will provide specific post-operative instructions for you to follow to ensure a smooth recovery.

In some cases, secondary procedures may be required to complete or refine your reconstruction.

Sun exposure to healing wounds may result in irregular pigmentation and scars that can become raised, red, or dark. Sun exposure may increase the risk of the development of skin cancer in another region of your body.

Recovery Period	What to expect
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain, swelling, and bruising are common • Dressings may need to be changed • Stitches may need to be removed • Avoid strenuous physical activity
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swelling and bruising should begin to subside • The surgical area may still be sore • Return to light activities • Continue to avoid strenuous physical activity
Week 3	<p>The surgical area should continue to heal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any remaining bruising and swelling should diminish • Return to normal activities, avoiding heavy lifting or strenuous exercise
Week 4 and beyond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The surgical area should be fully healed • Stitches should be removed • Resume normal activities and exercise • Regular check-ups with your doctor are recommended to monitor the healing process and prevent recurrence

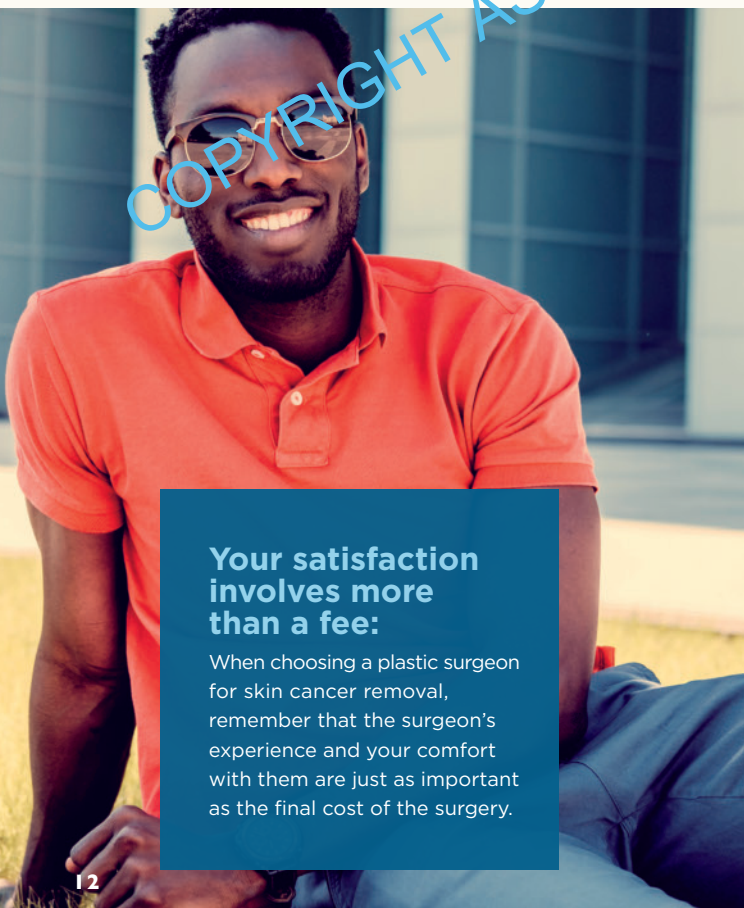
Cost

Prices for skin cancer surgery vary. A surgeon's cost may be based on their experience, the type of procedure used, and the geographic location of the office.

Cost may include:

- Anesthesia fees
- Hospital or surgical facility costs
- Medical tests
- Prescription medication
- Surgeon's fee

Your health insurance plan should cover skin cancer surgery, related complications, or another surgery to reconstruct your appearance. Pre-certification is generally required for reimbursement or coverage. Be sure to consult with your insurance company in advance of any surgery.



Your satisfaction involves more than a fee:

When choosing a plastic surgeon for skin cancer removal, remember that the surgeon's experience and your comfort with them are just as important as the final cost of the surgery.

Words to know

- **Basal cell carcinoma:** The most common form of skin cancer, which occurs in the epidermis. These growths are often round and pearly or darkly pigmented.
- **Cancer:** The uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the body. Cancerous cells are also called malignant cells.
- **Epidermis:** The uppermost portion of skin.
- **Excision:** A simple surgical process to cut the lesion from the skin.
- **Frozen section:** A surgical procedure in which the cancerous lesion is removed and microscopically examined by a pathologist prior to wound closure to ensure all cancerous cells have been removed.
- **General anesthesia:** Drugs and/or gases used during an operation to relieve pain and alter consciousness.
- **Intravenous sedation:** Sedatives administered by injection into a vein to help you relax.
- **Local flap:** A surgical procedure used for skin cancer in which healthy, adjacent tissue is repositioned over the wound.
- **Melanoma:** A skin cancer that is most often distinguished by its pigmented blackish or brownish coloration and irregular and ill-defined borders is the most serious form of skin cancer. It occurs in the deepest portion of the epidermis and for this reason, melanoma is the most likely form of skin cancer to spread quickly in the skin and to other parts of the body.
- **Mohs surgery:** A surgical procedure that's used when skin cancer is like an iceberg. Beneath the skin, the cancerous cells cover a much larger region and there are no defined borders.
- **Nevi:** A mole.
- **Skin graft:** A surgical procedure used for skin cancer. Healthy skin is removed from one area of the body and relocated to the wound site. A suture line is positioned to follow the natural creases and curves of the face if possible, to minimize the appearance of the resulting scar.

Questions to ask my plastic surgeon

- Are you certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery?
- Are you a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons?
- Were you trained specifically in the field of plastic surgery?
- How many years of plastic surgery training have you had?
- Do you have hospital privileges to perform this procedure? If so, at which hospitals?
- Is the office-based surgical facility accredited by a nationally- or state-recognized accrediting agency, or is it state-licensed or Medicare-certified?
- Am I a good candidate for this procedure?
- What will be expected of me to get the best results?
- Where and how will you perform my procedure?
- What surgical technique is recommended for me?
- How long of a recovery period can I expect, and what kind of help will I need during my recovery?
- What are the risks and complications associated with my procedure?
- How are complications handled?
- What are my options if I am dissatisfied with the outcome?
- Do you have before-and-after photos I can look at for this procedure and what results are reasonable for me?

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Make the Right Choice

Plastic surgery involves many choices. The first and most important is selecting a member of the **American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS)**.

ASPS member surgeons meet rigorous standards:

- Board certification by the American Board of Plastic Surgery (ABPS)[®] or in Canada by The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada[®]
- Complete at least six years of surgical training following medical school with a minimum of three years of plastic surgery residency training
- Pass comprehensive oral and written exams
- Graduate from an accredited medical school
- Complete continuing medical education, including patient safety each year
- Perform surgery in accredited, state-licensed, or Medicare-certified surgical facilities

Do not be confused by other official-sounding boards and certifications.

The ABPS is recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), which has approved medical specialty boards since 1934. There is no ABMS-recognized certifying board with “cosmetic surgery” in its name. By choosing a member of The American Society of Plastic Surgeons, you can be assured that you are choosing a qualified, highly trained plastic surgeon who is board certified by the ABPS or The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.



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