

### **Skin cancer**

In the 1930's, general surgeon Dr. Frederic Mohs developed a process to remove skin cancers with very high cure rates. This process was refined and today Mohs micrographic surgery is the gold standard in the treatment of several types of skin cancers.

*Basal cell carcinoma (BCC)* – the most common skin cancer. BCCs grow and spread locally to nearby skin and tissue. It is a slow-growing cancer and one that does not typically spread to distant organs (metastasis) or cause death. It is imperative these are taken care of while they are relatively small.

*Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC)* – second most common skin cancer. Depending on size, location, and subtype, these cancers can have a higher potential for distant spread and recurrence than BCCs.

*Other cancers* – Mohs surgery is also a recommended treatment for other skin cancers, including dermatofibrosarcoma protuberans, microcystic adnexal carcinoma, atypical fibroxanthoma, sebaceous carcinoma, and Merkel cell carcinoma.

### **Why Mohs surgery?**

Though the biopsy site may appear to be healing well at this time, definitive treatment is still recommended. Mohs surgery is a meticulous process that ensures that all the roots (which often cannot be seen on the surface or with the naked eye) are removed. Tumors can grow back if these microscopic roots are not removed.

The main objectives and advantages of Mohs surgery are:

1. Complete removal of the skin cancer confirmed by microscopic evaluation of the tissue.
2. Tissue conservation. The tumor and its roots are meticulously tracked and removed, while leaving as much healthy surrounding tissue as possible. Every millimeter of normal tissue spared means smaller scars and better cosmetic and functional results.
3. With the assurance that all of the tumor has been removed, your Mohs surgeon can confidently employ the full spectrum of reconstructive options to repair the area and provide the best cosmetic result.
4. All aspects of the procedure are performed under local anesthesia.

### **Scheduling the surgery**

In planning a surgery date, please note that **the first week following surgery is critical**. Rest and diligent daily care will optimize healing. Exercise, bending over at the waist, lifting, and straining can compromise the healing process. If your job or plans involve a high level of physical exertion/activity, consider applying for time off or making a request for light duty.

### **As the Surgery Day approaches...**

Starting one week prior to your surgery date, refrain from taking any **additional** aspirin/NSAID-type products (ie. ibuprofen, Aleve, Advil, Motrin). Instead, take Tylenol for pain relief. During this time, refrain from taking ginkgo biloba, St. John's wort, fish oil, vitamin E, or garlic supplements.

While you may have been instructed to keep the site covered with ointment applied, please leave the surgical site dry and uncovered on the days leading to surgery.

If the surgery involves the eye or impairs your ability to wear glasses, our office will let you know if a driver may be necessary.

Smoking cessation can GREATLY improve your overall health and your chances of you healing well.

If you have severe anxiety with medical and dental procedures, please let our office know. An anxiety-reducing medication can be prescribed.

If for ANY reason you cannot make the appointment or wish to change your surgery date, please call our office to let us know as soon as possible.

### **Surgery Day Checklist**

- ✓ Dress in layers to adjust to procedure room temperatures. Please know that incidental bleeding on clothing can occur.
- ✓ On the morning of the surgery, eat a good breakfast.
- ✓ Take a good shower. Our bandaging may make bathing and hair washing more difficult in the 48-hours after surgery.
- ✓ Take all your normal medications as directed. If you have been specifically instructed by us to take pre-operative medications, take them just as you leave the house.
- ✓ Bring a book, tablet, work, snacks, puzzles, or something to keep occupied during the waiting periods.
- ✓ Arrive 10-15 minutes prior to your scheduled appointment to allow for check-in

### **The Mohs procedure**

Before starting, your Mohs surgeon will go over the procedure and the plan for the day.

The healed biopsy site is confirmed and numbed with an injected local anesthesia, similar to what was used in the biopsy. The visible tumor and a very small amount of skin around it will be removed. You will then be asked to wait as the tissue is processed and read.

**Please be aware that the length of wait can vary greatly at each stage (typically between 20-45 minutes). There are several surgery patients we manage in different stages of their procedure. Some tissue can also require longer processing. During this time, please feel free to use the restroom, catch up on reading, or have a snack. Do not leave the building.**

The skin specimen will be carefully examined under microscope. If tumor is still present, the site will be re-numbered and more tissue will be taken. Another wait will ensue. This process of taking tissue, processing, and reading is considered a single stage in the procedure. Stages are repeated until no further tumor cells are detected and margins are clear.

It is difficult to predict beforehand how many stages will be required to remove the cancer. A significant majority of tumors are cleared by the third stage, and we give an estimate of 2-4 hours for the total duration of most cases.

### **Reconstruction**

Once the tumor has been removed, the resulting defect will often require surgical reconstruction. At this time, your Mohs surgeon will evaluate the defect, the surrounding tissue, and your individual circumstances to present you with your reconstructive options. Your surgeon will help you weigh the risks and benefits of each approach.

### **After the surgery – Post-operative care**

Following surgery, the medical assistant will give you verbal and written instructions on the specific care of your surgical site. Please refer to those instructions.

### **More Information**

American College of Mohs Surgery link: [www.skincancermohssurgery.org](http://www.skincancermohssurgery.org)

For any questions or concerns related to your Mohs surgery, please call us during office hours at **(714) 524-9700**.

If after business hours, please call your Mohs surgeon directly.

**Dr. Nguyen:** (415) 310-6858

**Dr. Ke:** (216) 225-0225