NON-MELANOMA SKIN CANCER IN WOMEN

The most common form of cancer is becoming more prevalent in women; causative factors have been further investigated.

What is non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC)?
NMSC, also known as keratinocyte carcinoma, mostly consists of basal cell carcinoma (BCC, 70% of cases) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC, 25% of cases). NMSC is by far the most common type of skin cancer. It occurs most commonly on the head, neck and other sun-exposed areas but can also occur on the trunk or elsewhere on the body. Over the past 50 years, the number of NMSC cases diagnosed annually has been steadily rising. NMSC occurs at the highest rates in white males; however, recent studies have demonstrated a new pattern of females developing BCC at earlier ages and at greater rates than in prior generations.

Causative factors of NMSC
The most important factors that increase the lifetime risk of NMSC include exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light, fair skin, exposure to ionizing radiation, immunosuppression, prior history of skin cancer, and a genetic predisposition/family history of NMSC. UV light exposure is considered a complete carcinogen. Sun exposure in both early life and adulthood is associated with NMSC risk. Smoking and high levels of alcohol consumption, particularly liquor and white wine, also increase the risk of developing NMSC. Exposure to carcinogenic chemicals is a less common causative factor of NMSC. Exposure to cutaneous human papilloma virus is associated with SCC development in immunosuppressed patients.

Tanning beds and NMSC
Indoor tanning works by exposing the skin to artificial UV radiation (UVR) and significantly increases the risk of developing NMSC. The practice of indoor tanning in more common in females of all ages when compared with their male counterparts, especially in the teenage and young adult groups. Studies have shown that an earlier age of first indoor tanning, especially under 25 years old, is associated with an increased risk of NMSC. Due to the evidence linking indoor tanning to NMSC, the World Health Organization classified UVR tanning devices as class I carcinogens.

Menopausal hormone replacement and NMSC
Menopausal hormone replacement therapy (HRT), in which patients take estrogen with or without progesterone (and their derivatives) after menopause, is used to counteract the bothersome symptoms of menopause. Recent studies have shown that HRT contributes to an increased risk of BCC. The relationship between HRT and SCC is less well-studied Any woman with history of menopausal HRT, regardless of treatment duration, should be screened more regularly by their health care provider for NMSC.

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