

Skin lesion removal

Definition

A skin lesion is an area of the skin that is different than the surrounding skin. This can be a lump, sore, or an area of skin that is not normal. It may also be a skin cancer.

Skin lesion removal is a procedure to remove the lesion.

Alternative Names

Shave excision - skin; Excision of skin lesions - benign; Skin lesion removal - benign; Cryosurgery - skin, benign; BCC - removal; Basal cell cancer - removal; Actinic keratosis - removal; Wart - removal; Squamous cell - removal; Mole - removal; Nevus - removal; Nevi - removal; Scissor excision; Skin tag removal; Mole removal; Skin cancer removal; Birthmark removal; Molluscum contagiosum - removal; Electrodesiccation - skin lesion removal

Description

Most lesion removal procedures are easily done in your doctor's office or an outpatient medical office. You may need to see your primary care provider, a skin doctor (dermatologist), or a surgeon.

Which procedure you have depends on the location, size, and type of lesion. The removed lesion is sent to the lab where it is examined under a microscope.

You will receive some type of numbing medicine (anesthetic) before the procedure.

The different types of skin removal techniques are described below.

SHAVE EXCISION

This technique is used for skin lesions that rise above the skin.

Your doctor uses a small blade to remove the outermost layers of skin after the area is made numb. The area removed includes all or part of the lesion.

You often do not need stitches. At the end of the procedure, medicine is applied to the area to stop any bleeding. Or the area may be burned with a cautery. Neither of these will hurt.

SIMPLE SCISSOR EXCISION

This technique is also used for skin lesions that rise above the skin level.

Your provider will grab the skin lesion with a small forceps and lightly pull up. Small, curved scissors will be used to carefully cut around and under the lesion. A curette (an instrument used to clean or scrape skin) maybe used to cut any remaining parts of the lesion.

You will rarely need stitches. At the end of the procedure, medicine is applied to the area to stop any bleeding. Or the area may be burned with a cautery.

SKIN EXCISION - FULL THICKNESS

This technique involves removing a skin lesion in the deeper levels of the skin down to the fatty layer under the skin. A small amount of normal tissue surrounding the lesion may be removed to ensure it is clear of any possible cancer cells (clear margins). It is more likely to be done when there is a concern about a skin cancer.

- Most often, an area the shape of an ellipse is removed, as this makes it easier to close with stitches.
- The entire lesion is removed, going as deep as the fat, if needed, to get the whole area. A margin of about 3 to 4 millimeters (mm) surrounding the tumor may also be removed to ensure clear margins.

The area is closed with stitches. If a large area is removed, a skin graft or flap of normal skin may be used to replace the skin that was removed.

CURETTAGE AND ELECTRODESICCATION

This procedure involves scraping or scooping out a skin lesion. A technique that uses high-frequency electrical current may be used before or after. This is called electrodesiccation.

It may be used for superficial lesions that do not need a full-thickness excision.

LASER EXCISION

A laser is a light beam that can be focused on a very small area. The laser heats the cells in the area being treated until they "burst." There are several types of lasers. Each laser has specific uses.

Laser excision can remove:

- Benign or pre-malignant skin lesions
- Warts
- Moles
- Sunspots
- Hair
- Small blood vessels in the skin
- Tattoos

CRYOTHERAPY

Cryotherapy is a method of super-freezing tissue in order to destroy it. It may be used to destroy or remove warts, actinic keratoses, solar keratoses, and molluscum contagiosum.

Cryotherapy is done using a cotton swab that has been dipped into liquid nitrogen or a probe that has liquid nitrogen flowing through it. The procedure usually takes less than a minute.

The freezing may cause some discomfort. Your provider may apply a numbing medicine to the area first. After the procedure, the treated area will blister and the destroyed lesion will peel away.

MOHS SURGERY

Mohs surgery is a way to treat and cure certain skin cancers. Surgeons trained in the Mohs procedure can do this surgery. It is a skin-sparing technique that allows skin cancer to be removed with less damage to the healthy skin around it.

Why the Procedure is Performed

It may be done to improve a person's appearance, or if the lesion is causing irritation or discomfort.

Your doctor may recommend having a lesion removed if you have:

- Benign growths
- Warts
- Moles
- Skin tags
- Seborrheic keratosis
- Actinic keratosis
- Squamous cell carcinoma
- Bowen disease
- Basal cell carcinoma
- Molluscum contagiosum
- Melanoma
- Other skin conditions

Risks

Risks of a skin excision may include:

- Infection
- Scar (keloids)
- Bleeding
- Changes in skin color
- Poor wound healing
- Nerve damage
- Recurrence of the lesion
- Blisters and ulcers, leading to pain and infection

Before the Procedure

Tell your doctor:

- About the medicines you are taking, including vitamins and supplements, herbal remedies, and over-the-counter medicines
- If you have any allergies
- If you have bleeding problems

Follow your doctor's instructions on how to prepare for the procedure.

After the Procedure

The area may be tender for a few days afterward.

Taking proper [care of your wound](#) will help your skin look its best. Your doctor will talk with you about your options:

- Your doctor may let a small wound heal itself. Most small wounds heal well on their own.
- Your doctor may use stitches to close the wound.
- Skin grafts: The doctor covers the wound using skin from another part of your body.
- Skin flaps: The doctor covers the wound with the skin next to your wound. The skin near your wound matches in color and texture.

Outlook (Prognosis)

Having lesions removed works well for many people. Some skin lesions, especially warts, may need to be treated more than once.

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