

What To Expect With Mohs Surgery

Overview

Mohs surgery is a surgical procedure used to treat skin cancer. During Mohs surgery, layers of cancer-containing tissue are removed until all of the skin cancer is gone. The goal is to remove as little healthy tissue as possible. Mohs surgery is done on an outpatient basis using a local anesthetic.

Mohs surgery also allows the surgeon to verify that all cancer cells have been removed at the time of surgery. This increases the chance of a cure and reduces the need for additional treatments or additional surgery.

What You Can Expect

Mohs surgery is done in a procedure room that has a nearby laboratory that allows the surgeon to examine the tissue after it's removed.

In most cases, the procedure lasts a few hours. But since it can be difficult to tell how extensive a skin tumor is just by looking at its surface, more time may be needed.

Preparing For The Day

Clear your schedule for the day.

It's not possible to predict how long Mohs surgery will take. You are advised to plan to spend the whole day in the office, though it may not take that long.

Wear comfortable clothing and bring a jacket or blanket.

Expect waiting time during your procedure. Bring something to help pass the time.

Why It's Done

Mohs surgery is used to treat the most common skin cancers - *basal cell carcinoma* and *squamous cell carcinoma*, as well as some kinds of melanoma and other more unusual skin cancers.

Mohs surgery is especially useful for skin cancers that:

- Have a high risk of recurrence
- Have recurred after previous treatment
- Are located in areas where you want to preserve as much healthy tissue as possible, such as around the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands, feet and genitals
- Have borders that are hard to define
- Are large or aggressive

Risks

As with any surgical procedure, Mohs surgery carries some risks.

Bleeding	You will have a pressure bandage placed over your wound when you leave to decrease the risk of bleeding.
Pain or tenderness around the surgical site	Pain is usually minimal and limited to the first night after surgery. Over the counter pain medications should be enough for your pain.
Infection	Antibiotics are not typically given after Mohs surgery. Contact your surgeon for signs and symptoms of infection.
Scarring	You can expect to have some kind of scarring caused by the removal of tissue and the closure of the wound. Scars are usually minimal and not typically deforming.

Other complications that may result from Mohs surgery are uncommon, but may include:

- Long term or permanent numbness surrounding the surgical area, if small nerve endings are cut
- Temporary or permanent weakness of the surgical area, if the tumor is large and a muscle nerve is severed
- Itching or shooting pain in the affected area
- An enlarged scar (Keloid)

During The Procedure

To prepare you for surgery, the area to be operated on is injected with local anesthesia. The anesthetic numbs the skin, so you won't feel any discomfort during the procedure.

Your surgeon then uses a scalpel to remove the visible cancer along with a thin, underlying layer of tissue that's slightly larger than the visible tumor. This takes only a few minutes.

The surgeon then takes this tissue to the laboratory for analysis. Expect to wait about an hour or so in a waiting room for this part of the procedure.

While you're waiting, the tissue sample is cut into sections and examined under the microscope.

Your surgeon takes great care to keep track of the exact spot where the tissue was removed by

making a map. That way, if a small area of cancer is found in one piece of tissue, the surgeon knows precisely where to continue with the surgery.

If cancer remains, your surgery will continue. Your surgeon removes an additional layer of tissue around where cancer was seen under the microscope.

Again, you'll wait while the surgeon examines that tissue in the laboratory.

The process is repeated until the last tissue sample removed is cancer-free.

The open area left by the cancer removal is then either closed with stitches or left to heal on its own.

Results

One of the advantages of Mohs surgery is that you know your results right away, and you don't leave your appointment until all of the skin cancer has been removed.

You may have a follow-up visit with a member of the surgical team to monitor your recovery to make sure your wound is healing properly.