



**MOHS SURGERY**  
SOCIETY OF  
SOUTH AFRICA

In association with



**SKINCANCER**  
FOUNDATION  
OF SOUTH AFRICA

# SQUAMOUS CELL CARCINOMA (SCC)

## WHAT IS SQUAMOUS CELL CARCINOMA?

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) is a common type of skin cancer. It starts in the squamous cells, which make up the middle and outer layers of the skin.

The majority of squamous cell carcinomas (SCCs) grow slowly. However, if left untreated, they can invade deeper layers of the skin and damage surrounding tissues. In rare cases, SCCs can behave more aggressively, spreading to other parts of the body and potentially becoming life-threatening. SCCs most commonly develop on sun-exposed areas such as the face, ears, neck, lips, and the backs of the hands.

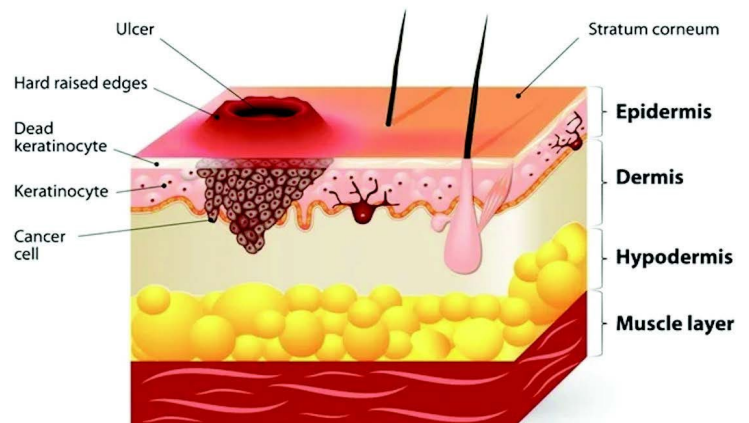
## WHAT CAUSES SCC?

- Long-term exposure to sunlight or tanning beds.
- Older age (more years of sun exposure).
- History of skin cancer.
- Weakened immune system.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Watch for any spot that:

- Looks like a rough or scaly patch that may crust or bleed.
- Appears as a wart-like growth.
- Is a firm, red nodule (bump).
- Forms an open sore that does not heal.
- Becomes tender, itchy, or painful.



If you notice a new spot or a change in an existing spot that does not heal, bleeds, or grows, have it checked by a dermatologist.



## HOW IS SCC DIAGNOSED?

- **Skin exam:** Your doctor will closely examine the suspicious area.
- **Dermoscopy:** A special handheld device (a dermatoscope) is used to look closely at the skin. This tool can reveal features of skin cancer that are not visible to the naked eye.
- **Biopsy:** A small piece of skin is removed and examined under a microscope to confirm the diagnosis.

## HOW IS SCC TREATED?

Your dermatologist will work closely with you to choose the best treatment for your SCC. Several factors will guide this decision, including your age, overall health, previous treatments, and the cancer's location, size, and type.

Mohs surgery is the preferred and recommended treatment for SCC's considered high-risk. These include cancers that are more likely to recur (come back), spread, or are located in areas where preserving appearance and function is especially important, such as the face, hands, or feet.

Routine wide local excision (cutting the cancer out with a wide margin of healthy skin) may be an alternative option if Mohs surgery is not available.

If surgery is not a good option due to age, overall health, or other medical conditions, radiation therapy may be recommended instead.

For low-risk skin cancers, less invasive treatments are often used. These may include freezing the cancer (cryotherapy), scraping and burning it off (curettage and cautery), light-based therapy (photodynamic therapy), or applying special creams.

Your dermatologist will explain all available options and help you choose the treatment that is best suited to your individual needs. When caught early, SCC is highly treatable.

## HOW TO PREVENT SCC

- Use broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) daily, even on cloudy days.
- Wear hats, sunglasses, and protective clothing.
- Avoid tanning beds.
- Stay in the shade between 10 AM and 4 PM.
- Check your skin monthly for new or changing spots.
- See a dermatologist regularly for a skin check especially if you are high-risk.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- SCC is a common and treatable form of skin cancer.
- Protecting your skin and doing regular skin checks are the best ways to prevent SCC.
- Early diagnosis and treatment give the best chance for a full cure.