

## **Eyelid Cancer - Overview** [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 05/2012

**ON THIS PAGE:** You will find some basic information about this disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net's Guide to Eyelid Cancer. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

Cancer begins when normal cells change and grow uncontrollably, forming a mass called a tumor. A tumor can be benign (noncancerous) or malignant (cancerous, meaning it can spread to other parts of the body). Eyelid cancer is a general term for a cancer that occurs on or in the eyelid and is broadly categorized as an epithelial (outer surface) tumor. An eyelid tumor can begin from sebaceous (fat), sweat, or apocrine glands (a type of sweat gland). The most common types of cancer occurring on the eyelid are:

**Basal cell carcinoma** [3]. Under the squamous cells (flat, scale-like cells) in the lower epidermis (outer layer of skin) are round cells known as basal cells. About 80% of skin cancers arise from this layer in skin, and they are directly related to exposure to the sun. Basal cell carcinoma is the most common type of eyelid cancer, usually appearing in the lower lid and occurring most often in individuals with fair or pale skin.

**Sebaceous carcinoma**. Mostly occurring in middle age to older adults, sebaceous carcinoma is the second most common eyelid cancer. It may start from meibomian glands (glands of the eyelids that discharge a fatty secretion that lubricates the eyelids) and, less frequently, glands of Zeis (sebaceous glands at the base of the eyelashes). Sebaceous carcinoma is an aggressive cancer that normally occurs on the upper eyelid and is associated with radiation exposure, Bowen's disease, and [Muir-Torre syndrome](#) [4]. A large sebaceous carcinoma, or one that returns after treatment, may require surgical removal of the eye.

**Squamous cell carcinoma** [3]. Squamous cells make up most of the top layer of the epidermis. Approximately 10% to 30% of skin cancers begin in this layer and usually arise from sun exposure, but may also appear on skin that has been burned, damaged by chemicals, or exposed to x-rays. Squamous cell carcinoma is much less common than basal cell carcinoma, but it behaves more aggressively and can more easily spread to nearby tissues.

**Melanoma** [5]. The deepest layer of the epidermis contains scattered cells called melanocytes, which produce the melanin that gives skin color. Melanoma starts in melanocytes, and it is the

most serious of the three skin cancer types.

Find out more about [basic cancer terms used in this section](#) [6].

*To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.*

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/eyelid-cancer/overview>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19618>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19364>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/Cancer+Types/Melanoma>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24928>