

## **[Skin Cancer \(Non-Melanoma\) - Diagnosis \[1\]](#)**

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board \[2\]](#), 06/2015

**ON THIS PAGE:** You will find a description of the common test doctors use to find out whether a suspicious mole, slow-healing sore, or other skin feature is cancerous. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

Doctors use many tests to diagnose cancer and find out if it has spread to another part of the body, called metastasis. Some tests may also determine which treatments may be the most effective. For most types of cancer, a biopsy is the only way to make a definitive diagnosis of cancer. Your doctor may consider these factors when choosing a diagnostic test:

- Age and medical condition
- Type of cancer suspected
- Signs and symptoms
- Previous test results

Because non-melanoma skin cancer rarely spreads, a biopsy is often the only test needed to diagnose and find out [the stage \(extent\) of cancer \[3\]](#). A biopsy is the removal of a small amount of tissue for examination under a microscope. During this procedure, the suspected skin lesion is removed, usually after a local anesthetic helps numb the area. The doctor also removes an area of healthy tissue around the lesion, which is called the margin.

The sample removed during the biopsy is then analyzed by a pathologist who determines if it is a skin cancer. A pathologist is a doctor who specializes in interpreting laboratory tests and evaluating cells, tissues, and organs to diagnose disease.

Your doctor will review the results of the biopsy with you. No further treatment beyond the biopsy may be necessary if the entire cancer was removed. However, if cancer cells were found in the margins of the removed tissue, additional treatment will usually be recommended.

Learn more about [what to expect when having a biopsy](#) [4].

*The [next section in this guide is Stages](#) [3], and it explains the system doctors use to describe the extent of the disease. Or, use the menu on the side of your screen to choose another section to continue reading this guide.*

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#### **Links**

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/es/node/19623>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/es/node/51>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19624>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24406>