

MOHS MICROGRAPHIC SURGERY

Patient Information

WHAT IS IT?

MOHS Micrographic Surgery (named after Dr. F. Mohs) refers to the surgical removal of skin cancer using microscopic examination to ensure, as much as possible, that the cancer is completely removed.

WHEN IS IT DONE?

MOHS Micrographic Surgery is not done as a routine procedure. For most routine skin cancers, simple cutting out (excision) or scraping is done. The patients who come for MOHS Micrographic Surgery have been selected as having unusual or more difficult tumours because of their type, size, location, or failure of other techniques to produce a cure.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Your procedure begins in the morning. The area around the skin cancer is frozen using local injection. The affected area is tested to ensure it is numb, then the skin and tissue around the obvious cancer is removed with a scalpel. This tissue is divided into smaller specimens which are prepared in our laboratory for examination. A map of the cancer site is made showing the relationship of the specimens which are then viewed under the microscope. During this preparation of specimens for microscopic examination, a bandage is applied and you await the results in the waiting room (usually one half to one hour).

The doctor studies the specimens for the presence of cancer at the edges. You then return to the operating area where any area of remaining cancer is cut out exactly as before. The process is repeated until no residual cancer can be found.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

Cancers may be present in skin, fat, muscle and, less frequently, in nerves, arteries, cartilage and bone. In more difficult cases, more time is required to remove all the cancer. It is not uncommon to stay for the full morning and part of the afternoon. Some patients will require less time, and some more. You should plan no other activities for the day. Remember, a large portion of the time spent is waiting while your cancer is examined in the laboratory. Family members can telephone in the mid-morning to get a better estimate of how much more time is required.

WHAT HAPPENS ONCE THE CANCER IS REMOVED?

Once the skin cancer is removed, the area of removed tissue is attended to. In most cases, the surgery to stitch up the wound is done following the excision and you return home the same day. In larger more difficult cases, arrangements may be made for any of the following: referral to another specialist for the reconstruction, admission to hospital or surgery requiring a general anesthetic.