Skin cancer is easiest to treat in its early stage. Typically the abnormal skin is removed in a procedure called a biopsy. In addition, a small margin of healthy skin may be removed around the abnormality. The skin that is removed will be checked for the spread of any cancerous cells. A biopsy may be done in a doctor’s office. A doctor that specializes in treating skin conditions is called a dermatologist.

If you have skin cancer, and it has not spread from the original site, you will be asked to come in for regular follow-up checkups after it is treated. In the rare case that your cancer has spread, you may be referred for treatment to an oncologist, a doctor that specializes in treating cancer. You will likely need to have additional physical exams and diagnostic testing. You may be referred for radiation therapy (treatment with high energy x-rays) or chemotherapy (treatment with medicines that kill cancer cells).

Any skin cancer left untreated has the potential for growth. Use sun protection regularly and minimize time in the midday sun. Commit to regular self-exams and professional skin screenings.

You can get more information about preventing and treating skin cancer at www.SAHealth.com or www.cancer.org. For information about local support groups and community resources, call the Methodist Healthcare HealthLine at (210) 575-0355 or toll-free at 1-800-333-7333.

Always talk to your doctor if you have specific questions and concerns about your health. Remember you should follow your doctor’s advice and orders over anything else you may hear or read.
Skin cancer affects over one million people each year. If it is caught and treated right away, it is almost always 100% curable. It is very important that each person know their personal risk of getting skin cancer. Everyone needs to recognize the signs of skin cancer.

Skin cancer is named according to where it starts. Melanoma begins in the melanocyte skin cells that cause color in our skins. Basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma are the most common forms of skin cancer. Together they are known as non-melanoma skin cancer.

Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer. If melanoma is not caught and treated early, it can spread to other parts of the body and may be fatal.

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation is the main cause of skin cancer. UV radiation can come from the sun or from tanning beds and sunlamps. The damage from UV exposure accumulates over your lifetime. Most skin cancer appears after age 50, but it is even found in teenagers now since children are getting more sun exposure than ever before.

Whenever possible, avoid exposure to the sun from 10am to 2pm standard time, or 11am to 3pm daylight savings time. Wear a sunscreen lotion that contains at least a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 to 30 whenever you must go in the sun. Wear sun-protective clothing and a hat if possible.

If you have many of the risk factors listed below, you must take even more care than average to control your UV exposure. Higher risk people need to be very watchful for the early signs of skin cancer.

Here is a list of risk factors:
- Exposure to the sun
- Severe, blistering sunburns, especially in childhood
- Family history of skin cancer
- Having more than 50 ordinary moles
- Unusual moles
- Fair skin that freckles
- Weakened immune system

Since most skin cancer is curable if found early and treated right away, it is important to spot the early signs of skin cancer, especially that of melanoma. Each person should have a full skin exam by a trained health care professional on a regular basis. Discuss with your doctor an appropriate screening schedule based on your risk factors. In addition to regular professional screenings, each person should do a monthly self-exam, looking for signs of skin cancer.

The most common warning sign of skin cancer is a change in the skin. This may be a sore, a growth that does not heal, or a patch of skin that becomes scaly and itchy. Basal and squamous cell cancer may look like a small, smooth, shiny, pale or waxy lump. The lump may also be firm and red, and can bleed. Basal and squamous cell cancers are usually found in the areas exposed to the sun.

Melanoma skin cancer usually starts out in a mole that becomes abnormal. This can happen anywhere on your skin, not just where you are exposed to sun. Look for the following changes in moles:
- Asymmetrical. Abnormal moles are unevenly shaped or notched
- Large Size. Abnormal moles are larger than 5mm.
- Rough or scaly surface.
- Odd color. Abnormal moles may be of mixed colors: tan, black, pink and red.
- Unusual sensation. If a mole itches or is painful or tender, it needs to be examined professionally.
- Abnormal skin around the mole. If the color from a mole spreads into the skin around it, or if the surrounding skin becomes white or gray, it may be melanoma.

Any unusual changes in your skin should be examined by a doctor without delay.