Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

About Your Mohs Surgery

This information describes what to expect before, during, and after your Mohs surgery at Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK).

About Mohs surgery

Mohs surgery is a type of surgery to treat certain skin cancer. These skin cancers include basal cell and squamous cell. It's done using a special technique to remove all of the skin cancer while saving as much of the healthy tissue as possible. This helps limit scarring.

Mohs surgery is the most effective treatment for skin cancer.

During your surgery, a layer of tissue will be removed from your skin and checked for cancer cells using a microscope. If there are cancer cells, more layers will be removed and checked for cancer cells. This will continue until all of the skin cancer has been removed and the margins are clear.

Mohs is an outpatient procedure, which means you don't need to be admitted to the hospital. You won't get general anesthesia (medication to make you sleep) during your surgery. You will get local anesthetic (medication to make an area of your body numb). For more information, view *Understanding Skin Cancer and Mohs Surgery* (www.mskcc.org/pe/understanding-mohs-surgery)

Risks of Mohs surgery

Talk with your healthcare provider about your risks with Mohs surgery. Possible risks include:

- Pain or tenderness at the surgery site
- Infection

- Bleeding from the surgery site
- Scarring
- Slow or poor wound healing
- Numbness at the surgery site
- The wound splitting open where the incision (surgical cut) was made. This is only a risk if your wound is closed with sutures (stitches).

Before your Mohs surgery

You'll get information about how to prepare for your surgery. You'll have time to review it and ask questions. If you're having a plastic surgeon close your wound, you will also get more information.

Your healthcare provider will review your medications and health history.

If you develop any illness (fever, cold, sore throat, or flu) or are hospitalized before your surgery, call your healthcare provider's office.

Depending on how many layers of tissue need to be removed, you may be at MSK for several hours. We recommend that you eat breakfast and bring lunch or snacks with you on the day of your visit. There will be a refrigerator where you can store your food, if needed.

If you have any questions, call your healthcare provider's office.

The day of your Mohs surgery

The length of your surgery depends on how many layers of tissue are removed. Some people may need to spend the whole day at MSK

During your Mohs surgery

First, you'll get an injection (shot) of local anesthesia to numb the surgery site. Once the area is numb, the cancerous tissue and a thin layer of surrounding tissue will be removed. A bandage will be placed on your wound.

After your wound is bandaged, you'll either stay in the procedure room or be

taken to a waiting area. You can relax and eat light snacks or your lunch while you wait.

A lab will process the removed tissue. Once your tissue is processed, your Mohs surgeon will examine all of your margins. If there are cancer cells at the border (edge) of the tissue, they will need to remove another layer of tissue.

These steps will be repeated until they find no more cancer cells at the borders of the tissue they remove.

Closing your wound

After all the cancer is removed, you and your surgeon will discuss the best way for your wound to close and heal.

Your surgeon may need to use stitches, skin glue, or a skin graft to close your wound. Some wounds may also heal on their own without additional repair.

If you need to have a plastic surgeon close your wound, this must be planned ahead of time.

Your healthcare provider will give you instructions about how to care for your wound at home.

After your Mohs surgery

You'll be able to go home right after your procedure.

Your healthcare provider will:

- Tell you when to come back for your follow-up visit. At your follow-up visit, you may have your stitches removed. Your healthcare provider will continue to monitor your healing.
- Send you home medicines that are safe to take for pain or swelling.
- Send you home with instructions about stopping or reducing your physical activity for a certain period of time.

Do not travel after your surgery.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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