

Walter K. Nahm, M.D., Ph.D.

Diplomate of the American Board of Dermatology
Fellow, American College of Mohs Micrographic Surgery
American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery

Dermatology
Mohs Micrographic Surgery
Laser Surgery
Cosmetic Surgery

Mohs Micrographic Surgery Questions & Answers

What is Mohs Surgery?

Mohs surgery is a highly specialized treatment for the total removal of skin cancer. It is named in honor of Dr. Frederic Mohs, the physician who developed the technique. Mohs Surgery eliminates the guesswork used with all other methods of treating skin cancer. Other methods require the surgeon to estimate how wide or deep the roots of skin cancer have grown. Mohs surgery differs by the use of complete microscopic examination of all tissues removed. This allows the Mohs surgeon to remove only the skin cancer cells and leave the normal skin untouched.

What are the advantages of Mohs Surgery?

By using detailed mapping techniques and complete microscopic control, the Mohs surgeon can pinpoint areas involved with cancer that are otherwise invisible to the naked eye. Therefore, even the smallest microscopic roots of cancer can be removed. The result is: 1) the removal of as little normal skin as possible, 2) the highest possibility for curing the cancer.

What are my chances for cure?

Using Mohs Surgery, the percentage of cure is more than 99% for most skin cancers, even when other forms of treatment have failed. Other methods of treatment offer only a 50% chance of success if previous treatments have failed.

Will I be hospitalized or put under anesthesia?

No, you will not be hospitalized. Mohs surgery is performed in a pleasant outpatient surgical setting and you may return home the same day. No, you will not be put under anesthesia. The area will be locally numbed only.

What happens the day of the surgery?

Our staff will escort you into a surgical suite where the area around the skin cancer will be numbed. Once it is numb, the visible cancer and a thin layer of tissue will be removed. This tissue is carefully mapped and coded by the surgeon and taken to the adjacent laboratory where the technician will immediately process the microscope slides. You will have a temporary dressing placed over the wound and you will be free to return to the reception area.

The surgical procedure alone takes 10-15 minutes. However, it takes a minimum of 1 1/2 to 2 hours to prepare and microscopically examine the tissues of each layer. Several surgical stages and microscopic examinations may be required, and you will be asked to wait in the patient reception area between stages.

Although there is no way to tell before surgery how many stages will be necessary, most cancers are removed in three stages or less.

We would like to make the time you spend with us as pleasant and comfortable as possible. You may want to bring reading material to occupy your time while waiting for the microscope slides to be processed and examined. You may want to bring a sweater, as the temperature in our office varies. Magazines will be available in the reception area. You are welcome to bring snacks and/or food and beverage since your stay with us may run through meal times.

The most difficult part of the procedure is waiting for the results from the laboratory. ***Since we do not know in advance how much time is necessary to remove the cancer and repair the wound, we ask that you plan to be in the office the entire day and that you make no other commitments. Please be sure to inform your companion and/or driver of this.***

Mohs Micrographic Surgery Questions & Answers (Continued)

What does the Mohs procedure consist of?

The Mohs process includes a specific sequence of surgery and pathological investigation. Mohs surgeons examine the removed tissue for evidence of extended cancer roots. Once the visible tumor is removed, Mohs surgeons trace the paths of the tumor using two key tools:

- a map of the excised tissue
- a microscope

Once the obvious tumor is removed, Mohs surgeons:

- remove an additional, thin layer of tissue from the tumor site
- create a "map" or drawing of the removed tissue to be used as a guide to the precise location of any remaining cancer cells
- microscopically examine the removed tissue thoroughly to check for evidence of remaining cancer cells

If any of the sections contain cancer cells, Mohs surgeons:

- return to the specific area of the residual tumor indicated by the map
- remove another thin layer of tissue only from the specific area(s) where cancer cells were detected
- microscopically examine the newly removed tissue for additional cancer cells

If microscopic analysis still shows evidence of disease, the process continues layer-by-layer until the cancer is completely gone. Selective removal of only diseased tissue using Mohs Surgery allows preservation of much of the surrounding normal tissue. This systematic microscopic search reveals the roots of the skin cancer which is why Mohs surgery offers the highest chance for complete removal of the cancer while sparing the normal tissue. Cure rates exceed 99 percent for new cancers, and 95 percent for recurrent cancers.

Will I be left with an open wound?

The best method of managing the wound resulting from surgery is determined after the cancer is completely removed. When the final defect is known, management is individualized to achieve the best results and to preserve function and maximize aesthetics. The Mohs surgeon is also trained in reconstructive procedures and often will perform the reconstructive procedure necessary to repair the wound. A small wound may be allowed to heal on its own, or the wound may be closed with stitches, a skin graft or a flap. On occasion, another surgical specialist with unique skills may complete the reconstruction.

Where can I find additional information about skin cancers, Mohs Surgery, and other skin diseases?

You can visit our website at DrWalterNahm.com and click on the "Education" section. From there you can click on the blue patient education library box and conduct a search of what you are looking for accordingly (I.E. Mohs Surgery).

Specializing in Cosmetic & Medical Dermatology

7695 Cardinal Court, Suite 200 • San Diego, CA 92123 • Phone: 858.278.8835 • Fax: 858.386.4776

• DrWalterNahm.com •