

What happens to the skin in the sun?

Ultraviolet radiation from the sun causes changes to take place in the structure of cells. Many years of exposure to sunlight will permanently damage the skin and the damage will worsen as long as the skin is exposed to the sun. Over 20-40 years many blotches, blemishes and brown age spots may appear. These can often be seen on the face, neck backs of hands and arms the “V” of the neck. The skin loses elasticity, becomes loose and wrinkled. UV radiation can cause skin cancer to develop.

What is skin cancer?

Skin cancer is an uncontrolled growth or spread of abnormal cells in the skin

There are 3 main types of skin cancer

1. Basal cell carcinoma (most common)

2. Squamous cell carcinoma (most common)

3. Malignant melanoma (most dangerous form)



Melanoma

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer that usually starts in the skin's epidermis (outer layer of skin). It can start in a freckle or mole, but more often, it starts in normal looking skin. Occasionally occurs in other parts of the body where there are melanocytes such as the eye, mouth or bowel. Melanomas tend to spread within the epidermis before they move into the deeper layer of skin, the dermis. If treatment is not undertaken, cancer cells may break away and be carried to other parts of the body

What does melanoma look like?

- Melanoma looks like an unusual freckle with an irregular or smudgy edge.
- It may have a variety of colours including brown, black, blue, red and occasionally light grey.
- The first sign of a melanoma is usually the appearance of a new spot on normal skin or a change in a freckle or mole.
- In the early stages a melanoma is normally flat, but it may become raised as it grows.
- The change may be in shape, size and/or colour, and this is normally seen over several weeks or months as it grows.



Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC)

- Most common but least dangerous type of skin cancer
- Around 70-80% of skin cancers in Australia are BCC
- They grow slowly over months or years and very rarely spread to other parts of the body
- May look like a red scaly patch of skin
- If not treated they may form an ulcer
- Occur in sun exposed areas
- Most common in people over 40, but can occur in younger adults

Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC)

- Around 15-25% of skin cancers are SCC's
- Less common than BCC but grow faster, usually over a period of weeks to months
- Occur on areas exposed to the most sunlight
- May look like red scaly spot or lump and may be tender to touch
- Can occur before 40 years of age
- Often develops from solar keratoses (sunspots)

Solar Keratoses

- Red, scaling areas of the skin
- Not painful or itchy, but may sting in the sun or if they are rubbed or scratched
- Not skin cancers, but most squamous cell carcinomas develop from solar keratoses
- Act as precursors to SCC's
- Sign of very sun-damaged skin and indicate that the skin is prone to cancer

Who is at risk to skin cancer?

- Over 270 000 Australians are treated for non melanoma skin cancer each year-the highest rate in the world
- Major cause is too much exposure to UV radiation from sunlight
- Everyone is at risk of developing skin cancer
- Those people with fair skin, red or blonde hair and blue or green eyes, who freckle easily, are at greater risk

Diagnosis

- If your doctor suspects you have a non-melanoma skin cancer they may take a biopsy to make a definite diagnosis
- Requires a removal of a small part of the skin that is sent off for examination

Treatment

Your doctor will advise you on the best treatment by taking into account:

-Your age, general health, the type and size of the cancer, its location and your personal preference.



The following treatments may be used:

- Surgery
- Photodynamic therapy
- Radiotherapy
- Cryotherapy
- Chemotherapy
- Immunotherapy

Reducing the risk**Be sun smart all year round to reduce your risk of skin cancer**

- Avoid the sun in the middle of the day.
- Use full shade when ever possible.
- Wear a broad brimmed hat at least 7.5 cm.
- Baseball caps do not provide adequate protection to the side of the face, ears and neck.
- Wear protective clothing- long trousers, long sleeve shirts, non reflective, allow good ventilation.
- Use very high protection, SPF 30+, broad spectrum, water resistant sunscreen.
- Layer sunscreen on 20 mins before going outside and reapply every 2 hours, do not rub it in.
- Protect lips with a lip balm or stick which a high SPF.
- Wear close fitting sunglasses.
- Sunglasses and hat worn together can reduce eye exposure when working around reflective surfaces.
- Check your skin regularly.

Skin cancer is PREVENTABLE! But it is up to you to do something about it!