

WILL SUN HELP YOU TO HAVE A HEALTHY SKIN?

This information is taken from the Cancer Research UK leaflet Skin Cancer: How to be SunSmart and reduce your risk

Summer skin care

GUIDE



Skin cancer: immunofluorescent light micrograph of squamous carcinoma cells

Why should I be careful in the sun?

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the UK and the number of people who get it is increasing. Skin cancer is caused by UV radiation from the sun. The greater your exposure, the higher your risk. Most skin cancers could be prevented by protecting ourselves from the sun's damaging rays.

Who is most at risk?

People with fair skin that tends to burn or freckle, red or fair hair or pale eyes are at highest risk. People with black, brown and darker olive complexions have a lower risk of skin cancer.

Why is it so important to protect babies and children?

Young skin is delicate and easily damaged by the sun. We usually get most of our lifetime's sun exposure as children and teenagers. Many skin cancers result from sun damage acquired during our early years.

What causes skin cancer?

Skin cancer develops when genes in skin cells are damaged by ultraviolet radiation (UVR). Most skin cancers are the result of excessive exposure to the sun.

What is ultraviolet radiation?

UVR is invisible and cannot be felt on the skin. It penetrates deeply into our cells, causing changes that can lead to sunburn, skin ageing, eye damage and skin cancer.

- UVA causes skin ageing and is also likely to cause skin cancer.
- UVB causes redness and sunburn. Exposure to UVB is the major risk factor for all types of skin cancer.

Is UVR always highest when it is hottest?

No. The sun does not need to feel hot to damage your skin. UV levels are highest around midday, but the maximum temperature often occurs late in the day, when the earth's surface has had time to warm up. The heat in the sun comes from infra-red rays, not UV rays – you can still burn on cool days. Here are the factors which affect the amount of UVR:

- Time of day – UVR is most intense when the sun is high in the sky, around midday.
- Time of year – the highest risk months in the UK are usually May to September. Near the equator UVR remains high all year round.
- Reflection – UVR can be reflected back from surfaces such as snow, sand, light paint, tiles, cement and water.
- Cloud cover – you can still burn on a day when there is thin cloud, but heavy cloud does offer some protection.

What is skin cancer?

There are two main types of skin cancer, malignant melanoma and non-melanoma:

- **Malignant melanoma** (also known as melanoma) is the most serious type of skin cancer. It usually develops in cells in the outer layer of the skin but can spread to other parts of the body and may be fatal. It is vital to detect and treat it early. Melanoma is the third most common cancer in 15 to 39 year olds and also affects older people.
- **Non-melanoma skin cancer** is the most common and easily treated type of cancer. More than nine out of ten skin cancers are of this type. There are over 40,000 new cases each year in the UK. There are two main sorts: basal cell cancer is the most common and tends to affect older people. It grows quite slowly and usually starts as a small round or flattened lump that is red, pale or pearly in colour. Sometimes it appears as a scaly, eczema-like patch on the skin. Basal cell cancers usually occur on areas of skin most exposed to the sun such as the head, neck, shoulders and limbs.

Squamous cell cancer is more serious than basal cell cancer as it can spread to other parts of the body if left untreated.

Squamous cell cancers appear as persistent red scaly spots, lumps, sores or ulcers, which may bleed easily. They also tend to affect older people and occur most often on the head, neck, hands and forearms.

Signs of malignant melanoma: See your doctor immediately if...

- An existing mole or dark patch is getting larger or a new one is growing.
- A mole has a ragged outline (ordinary moles are smooth and regular).
- A mole has a mixture of different shades of brown and black (ordinary moles may be dark brown but are all one shade).

The following signs do not necessarily mean that you have a melanoma, but you should still look out for them. If your mole or dark patch does not return to normal within two weeks, don't ignore it – see your doctor.

- An inflamed mole or one with a reddish edge.
- A mole that starts to bleed, ooze or crust.
- A change in sensation of a mole, like a mild itch.
- A mole that is bigger than all your other moles.

Signs of non-melanoma skin cancer:

- A new growth or sore that does not heal within four weeks.
- A spot or sore that continues to itch, hurt, crust, scab or bleed.
- Persistent skin ulcers that are not explained by other causes.

How do I avoid skin cancer?

Sunscreen does not offer total protection from the sun's rays and using it is only one way to reduce your risk of skin cancer.

Be SunSmart...

- Avoid the sun at its height (usually 11am-3pm).
- Take care never to burn.
- Use shade whenever possible: trees, umbrellas, shelters.
- Take extra special care of babies' and children's delicate skin.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses with UV protection.
- Cover up with tightly woven, loose-fitting clothing; long sleeves, trousers, skirts.
- Use a broad spectrum sunscreen (SPF15 or higher) on exposed skin.
- Avoid using sunbeds or tanning lamps.
- Check your skin regularly and report any unusual changes to your doctor without delay.

What does SPF mean?

SPF stands for sun protection factor, and is a measure of the sunscreen's ability to filter out UVB rays. The higher the SPF number the more protection you get. Higher factor sunscreens should not be used to increase the amount of time you spend in the sun, but to increase your protection.

What should I look for in a sunscreen?

- SPF of at least 15 – the higher the SPF the better protection.
- A 'broad spectrum' label (protects against UVA and UVB).
- Water resistance, as it is less likely to wash or be sweated off.
- A valid 'use by' date.

How do I use sunscreen properly?

- Try to apply it 15-30 minutes before going out in the sun.
- Apply to clean, dry skin and rub in lightly.
- Use generous amounts (golf ball-size quantities for small children).
- Re-apply every two hours or more frequently if washed, rubbed or sweated off.
- Put on before make-up, moisturiser, insect repellent.

Are fake tans or sunbeds OK?

As far as we know there is no harm in a tan that comes out of a bottle. But they do not protect you from skin damage or skin cancer. Use of tanning lamps or sunbeds is not safe – it is likely to increase your risk of skin cancer.

For further information:

Awareness leaflets on skin cancer and other types of cancer are available from Cancer Research UK Email: publications@cancer.org.uk or visit our website

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