

Skin cancer and you



Information for patient

This leaflet explains how to check yourself for signs of skin cancer, what makes you more likely to get skin cancer, how to be in the sun safely and how to use sunscreens.

Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your **name** and **date of birth** and check your **ID band**. If you don't have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address.

If we don't ask these questions, then please ask us to check.

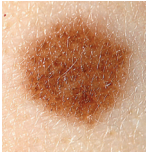
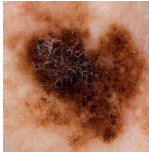

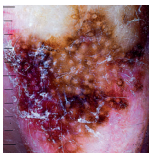

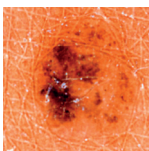
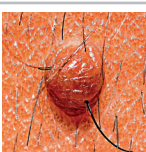
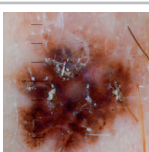


Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

How do I check myself for signs of skin cancer?

There are three types of skin cancer and each looks different. The most serious and dangerous is melanoma.

The first sign of melanoma is often a new mole or a change in the appearance of one you already have.

The ABCDE mole check guide below has pictures of a few changes that you might see if you have a melanoma.

Normal		Cancerous
	"A" IS FOR ASYMMETRY <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you draw a line through the middle of the mole, the halves of a melanoma won't match in size.	
	"B" IS FOR BORDER <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The edges of an early melanoma tend to be uneven, crusty or notched.	
	"C" IS FOR COLOUR <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Healthy moles are uniform in colour. A variety of colours, especially white and/or blue, is bad.	
	"D" IS FOR DIAMETER <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Melanomas are usually larger in diameter than a pencil eraser, although they can be smaller.	
	"E" IS FOR EVOLVING <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When a mole changes in size, shape or colour, or begins to bleed or scab, this points to danger.	



As skin cancers vary, you should tell your doctor about any changes to your skin, even if they are not similar to those shown in the mole check guide.

Remember: if in doubt, check it out!

If your GP is concerned about your skin, make sure you see a consultant dermatologist, who is an expert in diagnosing skin cancer. Your GP can refer you through the NHS.

What causes skin cancer?

UV light

Most skin cancer is caused by ultraviolet (UV) light damaging the DNA in your the cells of your skin. Most UV light comes from the sun in the form of sunlight.

Sunlight contains three types of UV light:

- ultraviolet A (UVA)
- ultraviolet B (UVB)
- ultraviolet C (UVC)

UVC is the most dangerous for your skin but it is filtered out by the Earth's atmosphere.

UVA and UVB light does get though the Earth's atmosphere and these can damage your skin over time, making you more likely to develop skin cancer. UVB is thought to be the main cause of skin cancer but it is not yet known whether UVA also helps to cause melanoma.

Artificial light

Artificial sources of light, such as sunlamps and tanning beds also make you more likely to develop skin cancer.



Sunburn

Repeated sunburn, either caused by the sun or by artificial light, increases your risk of melanoma.

What makes me more likely to develop skin cancer?

Moles

You have a greater risk of melanoma if you have lots of moles on your body, particularly if they are large (more than 5mm across) or they have an unusual shape.

It is important to keep checking your moles for changes and to avoid exposing them to strong sun.

Other risk factors

You are also more likely to develop melanoma skin cancer if you have:

- a close relative who has had melanoma skin cancer
- pale skin that does not tan easily
- red or blonde hair
- blue eyes
- several freckles
- skin that has been damaged by sunburn or radiotherapy treatment
- a condition that stops your immune system from working well or you take medicines (immunosuppressants) that suppress your immune system
- had skin cancer before.



How can I keep myself safe in the sun?



Slip on clothing that covers your skin, long sleeves, collared t-shirts.



Slop on sunscreen on exposed areas using factor 50+ for children.



Slap on a wide brimmed hat.



Seek shade - especially if outdoors between 11am and 3pm.



Slide on sunglasses to protect your eyes

The most important thing you can do is to avoid sunburn. Burning your skin in the sun makes you more likely to get skin cancer.

Sunburn does not just happen on holiday. You can burn in the UK, even when it is cloudy and you cannot see the sun, because the UVA and UVB rays still get through.



There is no safe or healthy way to get a tan. A tan does not protect your skin from being harmed by the sun.

You can cut your risk of skin cancer by:

- spending time in the shade between 11am and 3pm, March to October
- never allowing yourself to burn
- covering up with suitable clothing
- wearing sunglasses
- using a sunscreen which is at least factor 30.

Protecting your skin: Sunscreen

Sunscreen is good way of protecting yourself from the sun, but do not rely on it alone.

- Make sure you also wear suitable clothing and spend time in the shade when the sun is at its hottest.
- Do not stay in the sun any longer than you would without sunscreen.
- Make sure the sunscreen is not past its expiry date. Most last for two – three years. You can check it is in date and will still protect you against the harmful effects of the sun by finding the PAO symbol on the bottle, which looks like a jar being opened. This shows how long the sunscreen lasts. For example, '24M' means it will last for 24 months after it is first opened.

SPF rating

SPF stands for 'sun protection factor'. It is a measure of the amount of protection against ultraviolet B (UVB) light.

SPFs are rated on a scale of 2 to 50+, based on the level of protection they offer, with 50+ being the strongest.



Star rating

This measures the amount of protection against ultraviolet A (UVA) light. UK sunscreens have a star rating of up to five stars. The higher the number of stars, the better.

The letters 'UVA' inside a circle on a bottle mean the UVA protection is at least a third of the SPF rating and meets EU recommendations. Sunscreens that offer both UVA and UVB protection are called 'broad spectrum'.

What factor sunscreen (SPF) should I use?

The sunscreen label should have:

- an SPF of at least 30 to protect against UVB light
- a star rating of at least four stars to protect against UVA light.

How to use sunscreen

How much?

Most people do not use enough sunscreen. You should aim to put on about:

- **two teaspoons** of sunscreen if you are just covering your head, arms and neck
- **two tablespoons** if you are covering your whole body while wearing a swimming costume.

Make sure you use enough sunscreen. If you put it on too thinly, you cut the amount of protection it gives you. If you are worried you might not be using enough SPF30, you could use a sunscreen with a higher SPF.

Where?

Rub sunscreen into all exposed skin, including your face, neck and ears, and your head if you have thinning or no hair – but a wide-brimmed hat is better.



When?

If you plan to be out in the sun long enough to risk burning, you need to put sunscreen on twice:

- 30 minutes before going out
- just before going out

Then put more on **every two hours**, or according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Swimming?

Water washes sunscreen off and the cooling effect of the water can make you think you are not getting burned. Water also reflects UV light, increasing your exposure.

- Use water-resistant sunscreen if you are likely to sweat or get wet.
- Put more on straight after you have been in water, even if the sunscreen is water resistant, and after towel drying, sweating or when it may have rubbed off.

Protecting children from the sun

Take extra care to protect babies and children. Their skin is much more sensitive than adult skin and the damage caused by repeated exposure to sunlight could cause them to develop skin cancer in later life.

Keep children aged under six months out of direct strong sunlight.



Protecting your skin: clothing

You can also help to protect your skin by wearing appropriate clothing when you are out in the sun:

- wear a wide-brimmed hat that shades your face, neck and ears, especially if you have thinning or no hair
- a long-sleeved top.

Protecting your eyes

Wear sunglasses that provide good protection against UV light and that are marked UV300 or UV400, even on overcast days.

If you do not wear proper eye protection on a day at the beach you may get a temporary but painful burn to the surface of your eye, similar to sunburn.

Reflected sunlight from snow, sand, concrete and water, and artificial light from sunbeds, is particularly dangerous.

And you should never look directly at the sun because this can cause permanent eye damage.



PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road - staff will be happy to direct you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: **020 3299 3601**

Email: **kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net**

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net



Notes



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