

Skin Cancer

Awareness. Checking. Safety.



What is skin cancer?

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Skin cancer is cancer that starts in the skin. There are several types of skin cancer and these can be split into two groups: melanoma and non-melanoma – which includes basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC).

What causes skin cancer

The majority of skin cancers are caused by too much UV radiation from the sun and sunbeds. UVA and UVB are the two main types of sun rays, and both cause skin cancer by damaging the DNA in your skin cells. By avoiding sunbeds and staying safe in the sun, 9 in 10 cases of melanoma could be prevented.

How common is skin cancer

Non-melanoma skin cancer, basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma are the most common forms of skin cancer, with around 155,985 new cases in the UK each year. Melanoma – the most serious type of skin cancer – is the 5th most common cancer in the UK, accounting for 4% of all new cancer cases. Rates of melanoma skin cancer have increased by almost a third over the past decade.

Who can get skin cancer

Anyone can get skin cancer, however the risk is higher if you have fair skin that burns easily in the sun, red or blonde hair, blue or green eyes and a large number of freckles or moles. If you have had a lot of sun exposure and sunburn in the past, used sunbeds a lot, have a history of skin cancer in your family or you've had skin cancer before, your risk is also higher.

Is there a test for skin cancer

There is no national screening programme for skin cancer, however, people who have concerns about skin cancer or a family history can speak to their GP. The GP may then refer a person to see a skin specialist or genetic counsellor for further assessment.

Are there other ways to avoid skin cancer

Staying safe in the sun is the best way to lower your chance of getting skin cancer (both melanoma and non-melanoma). Do not use sun beds. Checking your skin on a monthly basis will help you to notice if there are any changes to existing moles, freckles or to a previously normal patch of skin.

38%

of UK adults do not associate sun exposure/sunburn to skin cancer risk

33%

of women aged 25-55+ worry about getting skin cancer in the future

37%

say they would be more likely to take part in screening with virtual support

What are you looking for when you check for moles?

When checking your skin for moles, you are looking for moles that are asymmetric (the two halves don't match), that have irregular borders, many colours and a diameter bigger than 6mm (bigger than a pencil). Remember this with the ABCD rule:

- Asymmetric
- Borders
- Colours
- Diameter (as well as 'different' and 'dark')
- Evolving

It's also helpful to remember the 'ugly duckling sign', which refers to a mole that looks different to those around it. An ugly duckling may be a single large dark mole in amongst a sea of smaller lighter moles, or it could be a single small light mole in amongst a sea of large dark moles. The point is that it's different from the rest.



How to check your skin for moles

With a little practice you can check your whole body for moles. Look methodically, zone by zone, in the following nine steps, using a full-length mirror and a hand mirror for areas that are less easy to see.

- General Scan
- Hands
- Arms
- Upper body
- Legs
- Back
- Face
- Ears
- Head

A partner or friend can help check areas that are difficult to see on your own, including the back, scalp and feet.



What should you do if you find something concerning?

The earlier a melanoma is found, the easier it is to treat, so it's important to see your GP as soon as possible if you notice a change.

What should you do if you don't have symptoms but want more information?

Melanoma Focus provides information and support for patients, carers and healthcare professionals. You can find NHS advice about sunscreen and sun safety [here](#).

Whole Human Cancer Care, from Risk to Recovery.