

# Skin cancer. Take a good look.



**13 11 20**  
Cancer Council



**Skin cancer is an uncontrolled growth of damaged skin cells mostly due to overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun.**

**Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. Each year there are close to one million treatments for skin cancer and more than 2,000 deaths.**

### **Did you know?**

- Two in three Australians will develop skin cancer in their lifetime. However, skin cancer is largely preventable by minimising overexposure to UV radiation.
- Finding skin cancer at an early stage significantly increases the chance of successful treatment.

### **Am I at risk?**

Everyone living in Australia has some risk of developing skin cancer, though some people have an increased risk. This includes people who:

- have fair skin
- have fair or reddish hair and/or blue or green eyes
- have many freckles, moles or sun spots
- burn easily and cannot easily develop a tan
- have a family or personal history of skin cancer
- spent their childhood in Australia
- have a history of sunburn during childhood
- work or spend a lot of leisure time in the sun
- do not protect their skin from the sun.

## Checking your skin

**Over 95 per cent of skin cancers can be treated successfully if detected early.**

But without treatment, skin cancer can be dangerous, or even fatal.

Get to know your skin and what looks normal for you to help you find changes earlier. Don't rely on an annual skin check to detect suspicious spots.

A significant number of skin cancers are detected by people themselves or a family member.

We should all check our skin regularly – at the start of every new season is an easy way to remember. If you have been diagnosed with a skin cancer in the past, you may need to check more often. Ask your GP or dermatologist what is right for you.

## How to check your skin

With a bit of practice most people can complete a skin check in around 15 minutes.

Whether you're doing it solo or with a partner, you will need to undress completely and make sure you have good light. If you're checking your own skin, use a full length and a hand-held mirror. If there are areas you can't see properly, don't ignore them, ask a friend to help.

Make sure you check your entire body as skin cancers can sometimes occur in parts of the body not exposed to the sun, for example the soles of the feet.

Go through the same checking sequence each time to get into a routine.

Check your:

- **Head, scalp, neck and ears**

Take an extra close look around the nose, lips, ears and scalp.

- **Torso** - front, back and sides

- **Arms, hands, fingers and nails**

Remember to look at the spaces between the fingers and the beds of your fingernails.

- **Buttocks, legs and feet**

Remember to check between toes, under toenails and on the soles of feet.

**If you see any new spots or anything on your skin that has changed in size, shape or colour or a non-healing sore, see your GP as soon as possible.**

## **Skin clinics**

Some people may decide to attend a skin clinic to have their skin checked.

There are many skin clinics available, offering a variety of services and fee arrangements.

Clinics that promote skin cancer checks are often private businesses run by GPs who have chosen to focus on skin cancer.

In deciding whether to go to a skin clinic, it is important that you find out about the services offered, expertise of the staff and the costs involved. Cancer Council does not operate or endorse any particular skin clinics.

**For an online guide on how to check your skin and what to look for, visit [myUV.com.au/finding-skin-cancer](http://myUV.com.au/finding-skin-cancer)**

## Skin cancer

There are three main types of skin cancer named after the skin cells they start developing in: basal cell carcinoma (BCC), squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) and melanoma.

Please note that the images shown are only a guide. Spots on your skin may look different.

### Basal cell carcinoma

- Accounts for approximately 66 per cent of skin cancers.
- Can be small, round or flattened spots that are red, pale or pearly in colour. Some are scaly like a patch of eczema.
- May become ulcerated, bleed and fail to heal.
- Grows slowly over months or years.
- Usually found on the upper body, head or neck.



## Squamous cell carcinoma

- Accounts for approximately 33 per cent of skin cancers.
- Grows over months and may spread if not treated.
- Can be scaly red areas that may bleed easily, ulcers or non-healing sores that are often painful, especially when touched.
- Often found on lips, ears and scalp.



## Melanoma

- Accounts for 1-2 per cent of skin cancers.
- Is the most dangerous and aggressive type of skin cancer. If left untreated can spread to other parts of the body and can be fatal.
- Grows quickly over weeks to months.
- Can appear as a new or existing spot, freckle or mole that has changed colour, size or shape.
- Can grow anywhere on the body – not just areas exposed to the sun.
- Occurs most frequently on the upper back in males and on the lower leg in females.

# The ABCDE of melanoma detection

Check your whole body for any of the following:



## Asymmetry

If the spot or lesion is divided in half, any two halves are not a mirror image.



## Border

A spot or lesion with a spreading or irregular edge.



## Colour

A spot or lesion with a number of different colours through it.



## Diameter

A spot or lesion that is greater than 6 mm across.



## Evolving

A spot or lesion that has changed over time.

## Warning signs

The following spots are not skin cancer but they do have an increased risk of becoming cancerous. If you have any of these, show your GP.

### Dysplastic naevi

- Are odd-shaped (also called atypical) moles that may indicate a greater risk of developing melanoma.
- Usually 5-10mm wide, with uneven colouring.

If you have lots of odd-shaped moles, have your skin checked regularly by your GP.





## Solar keratoses ('sun spots')

- Generally hard, red, scaly spots on sun-exposed areas of the skin.
- Occur commonly on the head and neck area and also on the backs of the hands.
- Are a warning sign that the skin has been damaged by the sun and that skin cancers may develop.

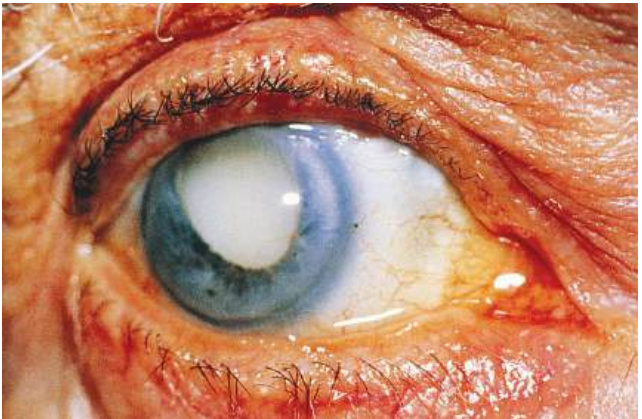
If you have solar keratoses you should protect yourself from further sun damage and get your skin checked regularly by your GP.



## Eye damage

UV radiation can also damage your eyes. It is important to protect your eyes by wearing sunglasses and a hat.

In the short-term, sun exposure can cause burns to the eye similar to sunburn of the skin. Longer-term exposure can lead to cataracts (clouding of the lens), pterygium (tissue covering the cornea) and cancer of the conjunctiva or cornea.



Cataract



Pterygium

# Skin cancer diagnosis and treatment

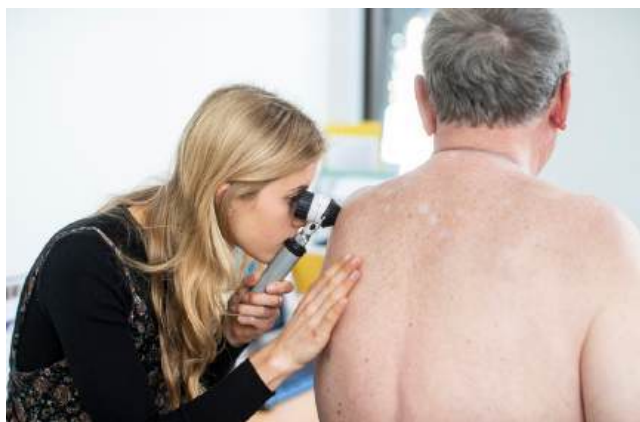
## Diagnosis

Skin cancer is usually diagnosed by a GP or dermatologist (skin specialist) who examines the skin, often using a hand-held magnifier (dermatoscope).

They may take a biopsy under a local anaesthetic to make a definite diagnosis. A biopsy involves removing a sample of cells and examining them under a microscope.

If a melanoma is diagnosed, further investigation may be undertaken to check for any signs that the cancer has spread.

In recent years, there has been a rise in smartphone apps and artificial intelligence (AI) for use by consumers for the early detection of melanoma. Research has shown that such technology should not be used by consumers to substitute a skin examination by a doctor. Cancer Council does not recommend the use of smartphone apps by consumers to self-diagnose skin cancer.



## Treatment

Your GP or specialist will advise you on the best treatment by taking into account the type and size of the cancer, its location and stage of development, your age, general health and your treatment preference.

Malignant melanomas need to be surgically removed (excised). In many cases, some of the surrounding tissue will also be removed to make sure that all of the cancer cells have been taken out.

If you have melanoma, your case will be reviewed by a melanoma specialist to discuss whether you require more tests and/or treatment.

The more common skin cancers (BCCs and SCCs) can be treated in a number of ways.

Options may include:

- surgical excision
- ointments such as Imiquimod cream
- cryotherapy - using liquid nitrogen to rapidly freeze the cancer off
- curettage and cautery - the cancer is scraped out and electric current is applied to stop bleeding and destroy any remaining tumour tissue
- photodynamic therapy - a special photosensitising cream is applied to the skin cancer and then exposed to a specific wavelength of light. The light interacts with the cream to destroy the cancer cells, and/or
- radiation therapy.

## After treatment

Regular check-ups are needed for early detection of any new skin cancers. If you notice any new spots or are worried between follow-up appointments it is important to speak with your GP or specialist as soon as possible.



# Be SunSmart.

## Protect yourself from skin cancer in five simple ways.



### Slip on sun protective clothing

Cover up as much of the skin as possible.



### Slop on SPF 30 or higher sunscreen

Make sure it is broad spectrum and water-resistant.



### Slap on a hat

Wear a brimmed hat that covers your face, head, neck and ears.



### Seek shade

Make use of natural or built shade or bring your own.



### Slide on some sunglasses

Close fitting wrap-around styles offer the best protection.

Sun protection is required when the UV Index in your area reaches 3 or higher. Check your local UV forecast at [myUV.com.au](http://myUV.com.au).

**Remember it is never too late to start protecting and checking your skin. If you notice any new or changing spots, see your GP as soon as possible.**





## Further information and resources

For more information including skin cancer diagnosis and treatment, visit **cancerwa.asn.au** or call Cancer Council on **13 11 20**.

UV protective clothing and accessories are available online at **cancercouncilshop.org.au**.

Visit **myUV.com.au** for your online skin check guide and to download the free SunSmart Global UV app.

Images courtesy of Dr Peter Randell, Dr Judy Cole, Dr Chris Quirk, Dr Jamie Von Nida, Dr Eleni Yiasemides and Skin & Cancer Foundation Victoria.



For support and information on cancer and cancer-related issues, call our Cancer Council nurses on **13 11 20** or visit **cancerwa.asn.au**.

Calls are confidential and available statewide Monday to Friday during business hours.