

How To Avoid Skin Cancer



▲ What's wrong with this?

And why is this a bit better? ▼



Key questions:

- What is the fastest rising cancer in the UK?
- Why is some sunlight good for you?
- Why does time of day matter?
- Where are men most likely to get a melanoma?
- How much UV gets through a car windscreen?
- What's the ABCDE of moles?

Key Words:

- Melanoma
- Hat
- Sunglasses
- T-shirt
- UV (ultraviolet)
- Sun Protection Factor
- Early diagnosis



Women are more likely to get skin cancer than men. But men are more likely to die from it.

What is skin cancer?

It is cancer that begins in the skin. There are two types:

- non-melanoma - cancer that develops slowly on the upper layers of the skin. These are more common but less serious.
- melanoma - these cancers are more serious and can spread to other parts of the body.

How serious is it?

Survival rates are improving but skin cancer especially melanoma can kill if it is not caught quickly.

Six people die every day in the UK from melanoma and 1.5 people a day from non-melanoma — men die more often than women.

The problem is that we are increasingly likely to develop skin cancer. Melanoma rates have increased 400% since the 1970s. This is the fastest rise of any major cancer in the UK.

It also affects men of all ages - rates are increasing among both younger and older men.

What's the treatment?

Surgery. The NHS spends a fortune on skins cancer care in hospitals - about £95million in 2014. This is mostly to cut out cancers and do skin grafts and flaps to cover up the damage. Best avoided.

In England, hospital admissions for skin cancer rose by a third in the five years to 2011.

How do you spot skin cancer?

Keep an eye on your moles. You have umpteen moles and marks on your skin. It's important to know how to spot when one of them has turned cancerous. The NHS have developed a checklist called the ABCDE:

A - asymmetrical. Does the mole have two distinct halves or an irregular shape?

B - border - does the mole have a notched or ragged border?

C - colours - is the mole a mix of two or more colours?

D - diameter - is the mole larger than 6mm (1/4 inch) in diameter?

E - enlargement or evolution - has the mole changed its appearance or size over time?

If you're answering yes to any of these questions, see your GP. There's only one thing between death and survival: early diagnosis.

Where are you most likely to get a melanoma?

Men are most likely to develop a melanoma on the chest or back (women on the legs).

Why has there been such an increase in skin cancer?

Mainly we're getting more sun. Rates have always

been higher in sunnier areas such as the south-west of England. (The number of new cases in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset is double the England average.) And skin cancer is one of the few cancers you're more likely to get if you're rich than poor.

Exposure to ultraviolet light (UV) is the main cause of the disease. The sun is our main source of UV so changing our behaviour slightly can reduce our risk enormously.

Should you stay out of the sun?

Some sunlight is good for you - it boosts vitamin D - but sun-bathing should be kept to a minimum.

Think about other places you might be exposed to the sun:

- driving (80% of UV gets through the average car window)
- gardening
- walking
- at work

Tanning devices and sun beds also increase your risk. (They can be even worse than the sun as the radiation is more concentrated.)

Your personal risk depends on your family history. Malignant melanoma risk is doubled in people with a family history of the same disease.

It also depends on your skin and hair type. Malignant melanoma risk is 57% higher in people with blue eyes than with brown eyes, for example.

It is 200% higher in red/red-blond hair, compared with dark-haired people.

As a rule, the more freckles/moles you have the lighter your skin type and the more you should stay out of the sun.

How do I protect myself?

- Remember, the sun is at its hottest between 11am and 3pm.
- Don't burn. Each time you do, you increase your risk of future cancer.
- Cover up. Many men protect themselves with hats, sunglasses and T-shirts (not too thin as UV can get through thin cotton). If you're exposed to a lot of sun at work your employers should help out with protective equipment.
- Avoid sun-beds and other tanning devices
- Check your moles

Any advice on sunscreen?

If you use sunscreen, the NHS say to make sure it is suitable for your skin type and blocks both ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) radiation. They recommend a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. Reapply every two hours and use waterproof sunscreen if in the water.