

Health & Wellbeing

November – Skin cancer



What is skin cancer?

Skin cancer occurs when skin cells are damaged, for example, by overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. Every year, in Australia:

- Skin cancers account for around 80% of all newly diagnosed cancers.
- The majority of skin cancers are caused by exposure to the sun.
- GPs have over 1 million patient consultations per year for skin cancer.
- The incidence of skin cancer is one of the highest in the world, two to three times the rates in Canada, the US and the UK.

Protect your skin

For best protection, the Cancer Council recommend a combination of sun protection measures:

- Slip on some sun-protective clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
- Slop on broad spectrum, water resistant SPF30+ (or higher) sunscreen. Put it on 20 minutes before you go outdoors and every two hours afterwards. Sunscreen should never be used to extend the time you spend in the sun.
- Slap on a hat – one that will protect your face, head, neck and ears.
- Seek shade.
- Slide on some sunglasses – make sure they meet Australian Standards.

UV Index

UV radiation is the invisible killer that you can't see or feel. UV radiation can be high even on cool and overcast days. This means you can't rely on clear skies or high temperatures to determine when you need to protect yourself from the sun.

The UV Index is reported daily by the Bureau of Meteorology. The alert identifies times during the day when the UV level is 3 or above and sun protection is needed.

As well as appearing on the Bureau of Meteorology website, the alert is published in the weather section of daily newspapers, on Cancer Council Australia's home page and as an app for smartphones.

You can download the SunSmart app for iOS or Android and keep track of the UV levels throughout the day.



Applying sunscreen

Sunscreen should be applied 20 minutes before exposure to UV in order to create the intended protective barrier. It should be applied liberally and evenly to clean and dry skin.

For an adult, the recommended application is 5ml (approximately one teaspoon) for each arm, leg, body front, body back and face (including neck and ears). That equates to a total of 35ml (approximately seven teaspoons) for a full body application.

Sunscreen should always be reapplied at least every two hours, irrespective of the water resistance of the sunscreen. Swimming, sport, sweating and towel drying can reduce the effectiveness of the product, so sunscreen should always be reapplied after these activities.

