

Skin Cancer Action Week

All Ages: Remember to be sun smart

By Rose Livingston, OSCAR Care Group

Cancer Council Australia reminds us during National Skin Cancer Action Week (November 17–23 2019), that two in three Australians are diagnosed with skin cancer by age 70. The action week is an important reminder to use sun protection and of the importance of early skin cancer detection for all Australians.

Seniors are vulnerable because they have diminished defenses against skin cancer and cumulative sun exposure from a lifetime in the sun. Immune systems get weaker, healing capacity is reduced and skin gets more fragile and thinner as people age. This means that older adults are very susceptible to fast-acting skin damage from the sun's radiation.

Sunburn

Sunburn causes 95% of melanomas, the most deadly form of skin cancer.

During Summer in Australia, 1 in 8 adults and 1 in 5 teenagers are sunburnt each weekend. Because of our outdoor lifestyle, many people get sunburnt while taking part in water sports and activities at the beach or pool, as well gardening or having a barbeque.

Sun exposure that doesn't result in burning can still cause damage to skin cells and increase your risk of developing skin cancer.



Understand Ultraviolet (UV) Radiation

Sunburn is also common on cooler or overcast days, as many people mistakenly believe UV radiation is not as strong. This is untrue – **you can still be sunburnt when the temperature is cool. THINK UV, NOT HEAT!**

In Australia, we have one of the highest levels of UV exposure & highest rates of skin cancer in the world.

Sun protection measures are recommended when the UV Index is 3 and above.

Evidence suggests that regular exposure to UV radiation year after year can also lead to skin cancer.

Check today's Hourly UV Index:

<http://www.bom.gov.au/uv/>



Tanning

The Cancer Council says that almost half of Australian adults still hold the misguided belief that a tan looks healthy. But tanning is a sign that you have been **exposed to enough UV radiation** (from the sun or solarium) to **damage your skin**. This will eventually cause loss of elasticity (wrinkles), sagging, yellowish discolouration and even brown patches to appear on your skin. Worst of all, it **increases your risk of skin cancer**.

Preventing skin cancer

Protect your skin

For best protection, when the UV level is **3 or above**, we 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+ 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 – that protects your face, head, neck and ears
- **Seek** shade
- **Slide** on some sunglasses – make sure they meet Australian standards.
- Be extra cautious in the middle of the day when UV levels are most intense.



What is skin cancer?

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

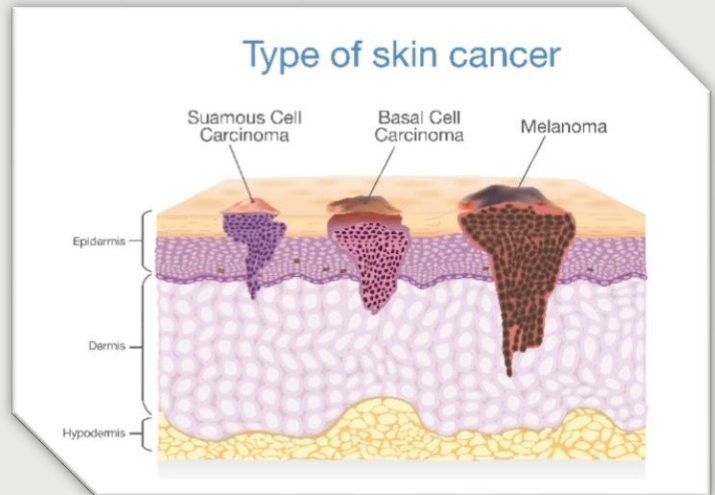
There are three main types of skin cancer:

- basal cell carcinoma
- squamous cell carcinoma
- melanoma: the most dangerous form

Diagnosis for skin cancer

It is important to check your skin regularly and check with your doctor if you notice any changes.

In most cases, your GP will examine you, paying attention to any spots that may look suspicious. Your GP may perform a biopsy (remove a small sample of tissue for examination under a microscope). Your GP may refer you to a specialist, such as a dermatologist, if necessary.



Skin cancer symptoms

The sooner a skin cancer is identified & treated, the better your chance of avoiding surgery or, in the case of a serious melanoma or other skin cancer, potential disfigurement or even death.

Become familiar with the look of your skin, so you pick up any changes that might suggest a skin cancer.

Look for:

- any crusty, non-healing sores
- small lumps red, pale or pearly in colour
- new spots, freckles or any moles changing in colour, thickness or shape over a period of weeks to months.

If you or someone you know has these skin cancer symptoms, see a doctor.

References: Cancer Council Australia: [Skin Cancer Action Week](#) and [About Skin Cancer](#)
Skin Health Institute: [Senior Skin Health](#)

