

## SKIN CANCER & BEING SAFE IN THE SUN

Northern Ireland's Leading Local Cancer Charity

## What is cancer?

The body is made up from millions of cells that are constantly dying and being replaced. Normally, cells divide in an orderly and controlled way. Cancer occurs when a cell divides and multiplies too rapidly. This produces a lump of abnormal cells known as a tumour. Tumours are either benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous). There are 200 different types of cancer and early detection can greatly increase the chances for successful treatment.

## Remember the ABCD of Melanoma

### A = Asymmetry

When half the mole does not match the other half



### B = Border

When the borders of the mole are irregular/ragged



### C = Colour

When the colour of the mole varies throughout



### D = Diameter

If the diameter is larger than a pencil eraser = 6mm

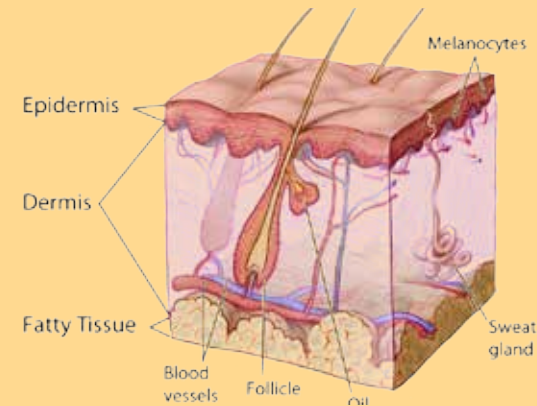


It is important to get into the habit of checking your skin once a month for any changes.

**IF IN DOUBT CHECK IT OUT**

## The SKIN

The skin is a body organ. It does several important jobs, such as being a barrier and protecting everything inside your body. The skin is divided into two main layers. The outer layer is the epidermis and the layer underneath is the dermis. Below these is a deeper layer of fatty tissue.



## What causes skin cancer?

Most skin cancers are caused by exposure to the sun. Risk is especially high if you had several episodes of sunburn in childhood.

There are approximately 319 people a year in Northern Ireland diagnosed with malignant melanoma cancer and 3359 people diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer.



## Symptoms of skin cancer

The symptoms of melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer differ.

**Non-melanoma** occurs most commonly on skin that is exposed to the sun and symptoms can be similar to non-cancerous skin conditions.

- Spot or sore that does not heal within 4 weeks
- A spot or sore that continues to hurt, scab, bleed or itch for over 4 weeks
- Areas of skin that have broken down or formed an ulcer without cause and does not heal within 4 weeks

Any of these symptoms should be checked by your GP.

**Melanoma** skin cancer most commonly occurs on a mole and there are definite signs which should be investigated by a doctor. Look out for changes below in moles-

- Change in size
- Change in colour- darker, patchy or multiple shades
- Change in shape or loss of symmetry
- Itching or pain
- Inflammation
- Bleeding or crusting



## Action Cancer also provides...

### Early Detection

A breast screening service is available onboard the Big Bus and in Action Cancer House in Belfast. Health checks are also available onboard the Big Bus.

### Support Services

Complementary therapy, Counselling and the Listening Ear Service are available for those closely affected by cancer in order to enhance quality of life.

### Education

Information on our website and leaflets on cancer prevention and early detection. Our health promotion team delivers talks to schools, workplaces and groups across Northern Ireland.

**Action Cancer is Northern Ireland's leading local cancer charity. All of the services we provide are confidential. We depend heavily on public and business donations to keep our services going.**

# Skin Cancer Risk Factors

People with certain risk factors are more likely than others to develop skin cancer. Risk factors vary for different types of skin cancer, but some general risk factors are –

- Sunburn – UV exposure is the main preventable cause of skin cancer
- Skin colour/type (see skin type guide)
- Number of moles
- Family history
- Previous skin cancer
- Sunbed use
- Age – risk increases with age

# Skin cancer prevention

Due to the alarming increase in rates of skin cancer it is important to be aware of what you can do to protect our skin.

Most people think you will get skin cancer as a result of being burnt abroad but it is also general exposure to our daily climate that is causing the problem.



# Safe sun rules

Remember the 5 tips for sun safety  
**SLIP, SLOP, SLAP, SEEK, SLIDE**

- 1) Slip on a t-shirt and cover up areas such as shoulders and back which burn easily is one of the most effective ways to avoid sunburn.
- 2) Slop on sun cream, ensure this offers UVA and UVB protection.
  - Sun protection factor (SPF) tells you the amount of protection against UVB rays. The higher the spf the greater the protection. Sun cream should be no lower than spf 15, regardless of skin type. Lower than spf 15 does not provide adequate protection.
  - The star rating system below indicates the amount of protection against UVA rays. The higher the star rating the more protection offered.
  - Apply sun cream at least 20 minutes before going out in the sun and keep topping up throughout the day. Reapply all sun creams every 2 hours.
  - Remember to protect your lips using a lip balm containing spf.



- 3) Slap on a hat to protect face, ears and neck as these areas are exposed to the sun and easily burnt.
- 4) Seek shade or stay indoors between 11am and 3pm as this is when the sun is at its strongest.
- 5) Slide on sunglasses and remember when choosing sun glasses look for the 'CE Mark' and British Standard (BS EN 1836:1997) which indicates a safe level of protection.
  - 100% UV protection and UV absorption up to 400nm.
  - Sun glasses should also screen out 75-95% light.
  - Tip- if you look in a mirror and can see your eyes through the lenses they are probably allowing in too much light.

Never use sunbeds. UV rays from sunbeds can be 10 times stronger than the midday sun.



# Know your skin

Not everyone's skin reacts in the same way to the sun. Knowing your skin type is important in reducing your risk of sunburn and skin damage.



## TYPE 1

Often burns, rarely tans. Tends to have freckles, red or fair hair, blue or green eyes.



## TYPE 2

Usually burns, sometimes tans. Tends to have light hair, blue or brown eyes.



## TYPE 3

Sometimes burns, usually tans. Tends to have brown hair and eyes.



## TYPE 4

Rarely burns, often tans. Tends to have dark brown eyes and hair.



## TYPE 5

Naturally brown skin. Often has dark brown eyes and hair.



## TYPE 6

Naturally black-brown skin. Usually has black-brown eyes and hair.

High Risk



Low Risk