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SUN AWARENESS

Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. In 2019, more than 2,000 Australians died from this almost-entirely preventable disease. You do not need to experience sun burn in order to develop skin cancer, as they can develop through cumulative sun exposure. Fortunately, being sun smart is a simple and effective way to reduce your risk of developing skin cancer.

HOW DO WE DEVELOP SKIN CANCER?

Majority of skin cancers in Australia are caused by exposure to UV radiation from the sun. There are three types of UV radiation: UVA, UVB and UVC, with A and B known to reach the Earth's surface.

UVA radiation accounts for up to 95 percent of the solar UV radiation that reaches the Earth's surface. This radiation can penetrate into the deeper layers of the skin and has for years been thought to play a major role in skin aging and wrinkling. Importantly, studies strongly suggest that this radiation may also initiate and exacerbate the development of skin cancers. UVA rays are present during all daylight hours and throughout the winter months.
UVB is very biologically active and is responsible for: skin burning and tanning, acceleration of ageing and the development of skin cancer. More prevalent through the summer months, the intensity of UVB varies by: season, geographic location and time of day. These UV rays are also able to reflect off water or snow, indicating why it is important to protect your skin all year round.

WHAT IS SKIN CANCER?

Skin cancer occurs when skin cells are damaged. For example, through 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 of skin cancer

Basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma are both known as non-melanoma skin cancer. More than 430,000 people are treated for one or more non-melanoma skin cancer in Australia each year. Non-melanoma skin cancer is more common in men, with almost twice the incidence compared to women. Excluding non-melanoma skin cancer, melanoma of the skin is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in both Australian women and men, and the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australians aged 15 - 39 years.

BURINING STATISTICS

- Skin cancers account for approximately 80% of all newly diagnosed cancers in Australia
- Between 95 and 99 percent of all 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 in Australia is one of the highest in the world; two to three times the rates in Canada, the US and the UK

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WHO IS MOST AT RISK OF DEVELOPING SKIN CANCER?

All skin types can be damaged by too much exposure to UV radiation. However, skin types that are more sensitive to sunburn are at a greater risk of skin cancer. Family history of skin cancer also increases individuals' skin cancer likelihood, and if diagnosed with a skin cancer you will require more regular checks from that point onwards as you are at higher risk of developing subsequent skin cancers. Eye damage from UV exposure can occur regardless of skin type or age. skin - including alertness to new or changing moles, freckles and spots over your entire body - remembering that skin cancers do not always present on parts of the body that are directly sun-exposed.

"Two in three Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer by the time they are 70."

- Cancer Council

SIMPLE SELF-SKIN SCREENING

The ABCDE screening approach is a straightforward and effective way to check for changes to your skin.
While performing this skin check, remember that if you notice anything unusual, different or concerning you should follow up with your doctor.

The ABCDE mnemonic reminds you of five different aspects of changing skin appearance to look out for:

Asymmetry (unevenness) – One half of the spot or mole does not match the other

Border – The edges of the spot are irregular, ragged, notched or blurred

Colour – The colour of the spot is not the same all over and may include shades of brown or black, red, white or blue

Diameter – The spot is larger than 6mm across or is increasing in size

Evolution / Elevation – The spot or mole may have changed in shape or size (enlarge), or a previously flat spot may become raised in matter of a few weeks

PROTECT YOUR SKIN

It is important to be extra cautious of sun exposure during the middle of the day when UV levels are highest or most intense. For most effective UV protection, the Cancer Council advises 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 SPF50+ sunscreen
- Slap on a hat that protects your face, head, neck and
- ears
- Seek shade
- Slide on some sunglasses, ideally with an SPF rating of 2 or above.

ACQUIRING A SAFE TAN

There are numerous ways of obtaining a tan that do not involve direct sun exposure. These include the use of tanning lotion, mousse, gel or spray-on. Remember there is no safe tan apart from a fake one!
It is important to remember that UV levels can vary greatly across Australia even in the same day. Factors contributing to this include: time of day, season, geographic location, cloudcover density, proximity to the equator and reflection of the sun's rays.
It is critical to remember that the UV Index does not solely relate to the presence or lack of sunshine, or cloud cover in the sky. The UV Index can still be extremely high even when it is a cool, cloudy day.

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NOTES ON SUNSCREEN:

Ensure the sunscreen that you use is a broad spectrum sunscreen that will protect you from both UVA and UVB rays. Apply sunscreen liberally – at least one teaspoon for each arm, leg, front and back of the body and a teaspoon for the face, neck and ears.

- Do not forget to apply sunscreen to your lips!
- Apply sunscreen 20 minutes before exposing your skin to direct sunlight, this provides time for it to soak in and provide effective protection.
- Re-apply sunscreen at least every 2 hours. If you are sweating, swimming, have showered, or have wiped the sunscreen off, you will need to reapply it more often.

UNDERSTANDING UV

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation is a form of energy produced by the sun; in addition to visible light (sunlight) and infrared radiation (felt as heat). The challenge with UV radiation is that we cannot see or feel its wavelengths, with exposure to it a major cause of skin cancer.

The UV Index is a rating system which can be used to assess the level and strength of ultraviolet radiation present in the atmosphere each day, and sebsequent risk through exposure. With Australia known to experience some of the highest UV levels in the world, it is important to check the UV Index on days when you will be spending periods of time outside.

When the daily UV Index reaches a rating of three or higher, a combination of sun protection measures (hats, long-sleeved shirts and pants, sunscreen, shade, and sunglasses) are needed.