

Sense in the Sun

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun can cause sunburn, wrinkling, sagging and early ageing of skin, and skin cancers. Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. One in two Australians develop skin cancer in their lifetime. Our skin needs protection from the sun, especially in summer.

UV radiation is the part of sunlight that damages skin. We cannot see it or feel it. A sun tan is a sign of UV skin damage and does not protect against skin cancer. UV radiation can also damage eyes.

UV radiation

More UV radiation reaches the earth's surface in the middle of the day, during summer, at high altitudes and close to the equator. Less UV radiation reaches the earth's surface in the morning and evening when the sun is closer to the horizon. UV radiation is not related to temperature.

- UV radiation is strongest and most dangerous from 10 am to 3 pm.
- Clouds do not block out damaging UV radiation.
- Light-coloured and shiny surfaces (e.g. concrete, sand, snow, water)

reflect sunlight and increase exposure to UV radiation.

- Sunlight passes through water and can damage skin while swimming.
- Solariums and sunbeds produce UV radiation up to five times as strong as the midday summer sun.

Look for the *SunSmart UV Alert* each day in the newspaper weather forecast or on the Australian Bureau of Meteorology website. When the UV Index is 3 or above, sun protection is required.



Skin cancer

The major cause of skin cancer is UV radiation. Anyone who spends time in the sun is at risk of developing skin cancer, regardless of skin colour. Skin cancer in adults is also related to the amount of sun exposure during childhood and teenage years. People more at risk of skin cancer include those who have:

- a lot of exposure to UV radiation over their lifetime
- been sunburnt
- a large number of moles or unusual moles
- fair skin that burns easily, freckles and does not tan
- a family history of skin cancer
- used solariums, sunlamps or sunbeds.

Types of skin cancer

Melanoma

- the most dangerous skin cancer
- may be a new spot or a spot, freckle or mole you already have that changes colour, size or shape
- usually has an irregular or smudgy outline and may be more than one colour
- grows over weeks to months and can appear anywhere on the body
- if treated early, most people with melanoma can be cured
- if not treated, melanoma can spread to other parts of the body.

Squamous cell carcinoma

- appears as a thickened, red, scaly spot that may bleed or form an ulcer
- usually appears on skin most often exposed to UV radiation
- grows over some months
- can usually be treated if found early.

Basal cell carcinoma

- the most common and least dangerous skin cancer
- red, pale or pearly in colour
- looks like a round or flattened lump or scaly area
- may become an ulcer or sore that doesn't heal properly
- usually appears on skin most often exposed to UV radiation
- grows slowly
- can usually be treated if found early.

Other skin spots

Sunspots, freckles and moles may be warning signs of sun damage and future skin cancer.

Sunspots (solar keratosis)

- red, flat scaling dry skin which may sting if scratched
- appear on skin most often exposed to the sun
- most common in people over 40 years of age.

Freckles and moles

- harmless brown and black spots on the skin
- moles are usually round or oval-shaped, and may be raised
- the number of moles on the skin may increase with sun exposure.

Self care

The best UV protection is to protect your skin in a number of ways including:

- **Slip** on sun - protective clothing that covers as much of your body as possible. Wear a shirt while swimming.
- **Slop** on at least SPF 30+ sunscreen. Make sure you apply it properly and regularly.
- **Slap** on a hat when outside. Wear a wide-brimmed or legionnaire-style hat to protect the whole face, neck, ears and head.
- **Seek** shade. Shade is one of the best ways to protect against the sun's UV rays.
- **Slide** on a pair of sunglasses. It is best to wear a wrap-around style that doesn't let light in around the frames. Wear sunglasses with an Eye Protection Factor (EPF) rating above 2.
- Plan family outdoor activities to suit the child with the most sensitive skin.
- In summer, try to do indoor activities during the middle of the day.
- Avoid tanning with sunlamps, sunbeds or solariums.
- Some medicines and cosmetics can make skin more sensitive to the sun. Ask a pharmacist for advice.
- Protect your lips with sunscreen all year round, especially if you have ever had a cold sore.

Sunscreens

- Use at least SPF 30+ broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen.
- Apply sunscreen to clean, dry skin 20-30 minutes before going outside.
- Re-apply sunscreen every two hours, or according to directions. Re-apply more often if you are swimming or playing sport.
- Put sunscreen on children before they go to school.
- Carry spare sunscreen in your bag or in a cool place in the car.
- Sunscreens have an expiry date. Most sunscreens will last 2-3 years if stored below 25°C. Don't use a sunscreen if it is out of date.
- Don't use sunscreen as your only form of sun protection. No sunscreen offers 100% protection from UV radiation.

Important

Check your skin at least every six months. Seek medical advice if you have:

- an unusual skin condition that does not heal within four weeks, including any lump, sore, ulcer or scaly patch on the skin, or white patch on the lips
- a freckle, mole or spot that appears or changes over a period of months
- a freckle, mole or spot with an irregular shape, uneven surface or colour change.

Most skin cancers can be cured if treated early.

For more information

SunSmart

Website: www.sunsmart.com.au

The Cancer Council

Phone: 13 11 20

Website: www.cancer.org.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthdirect.org.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

NPS MedicineWise

Medicines Information Line

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

***Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.***

Related fact cards

» ***Cold Sores***

» ***Vision Impairment***

Your Self Care Pharmacy:

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia is committed to providing current and reliable health information.

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