

Skin Cancer's Origins

The highest rate of skin cancer can be found in Australia. The rate of occurrence is so high that one in every two people develops it in one form or another. The primary cause is unprotected exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun and tanning machines. Although ultraviolet radiation cannot be felt or seen it can cause sunburns, early aging and harm to the skin that could lead to skin cancer.

Skin cancer is linked with a lifetime exposure of UV radiation and most parts of Australia have all year round high levels of ultraviolet radiation.

Although skin cancer usually appears in older adults, the damage to the skin begins from an early age due to the UV exposure of the sun, such as sunburn.

Recent research has indicated that the white cells become damaged, often in childhood and the subsequent sun exposure in adulthood can prompt the cells to develop cancer.

Although anyone can develop skin cancer, the risks are intensified if a person:

- * Has an immune system that is compromised due to reasons such as presence of the HIV virus or use of certain drugs following an organ transplant.
- * Does not shield their skin from the sun
- * Has blonde or red hair with green or blue eyes
- * Has infrequent but intense exposures to the sun
- * Spends a great deal of time in the sun, such as working
- * Has an excess of moles
- * Was born or spent their childhood in Australia or New Zealand
- * Experienced sunburn in childhood
- * Has fair skin that freckles and burns quickly without an easy tan
- * Has solar keratoses (also known as sun spots)

Those with dark or olive skin enjoy better protection from the sun due to the fact that they produce more melanin in the skin than people with fair skin. However, the ultraviolet radiation in the sun is stronger in Australia, thus people with dark and olive skin need to protect their skin as well.

You can guard your skin from cancer by:

- * Wearing clothing that will cover you as much as possible, particularly the back of your neck. Shirts should have long sleeves, trousers and skirts should protect all the legs. Woven fabric offers the best protection.
- * Staying out of the sun between 11am and 3pm, when the sun is at its strongest. More than 60 percent of the sun's radiation contacts the earth's surface during these hours.
- * Eyes should be guarded with sunglasses
- * Using as much shade as possible, like umbrellas, trees and buildings. Shades should be selected carefully as ultraviolet radiation can bounce off surfaces such as water, concrete and sand, which can cause sunburn
- * Hats should be worn to shield the face, ears and neck and should have a brim that is at least eight to 10 centimeters.
- * Do not use tanning machines such as sun lamps
- * Sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 needs to be worn whenever in the sun. It should be water resistant and be applied at least 20 minutes before going into the sun and reapplied every two hours or immediately after swimming or sweating.