

Sense in the sun

The Health Column

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Approximately two-thirds of Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer by the age of 70. In Australia in 2016, it is estimated that 13,283 new cases of melanoma skin cancer will be diagnosed. As summer approaches, these statistics should serve as a wake-up call to all Australians about the importance of sun protection.



The incidence of skin cancer has risen in Australia. In 1982, the number of new cases of melanoma skin cancer diagnosed was 3,526, and this has increased to 12,036 new cases of melanoma skin cancer diagnosed in 2012.

Non-melanoma skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in Australia, and is more common in men, with almost double the incidence compared to women. More than 750,000 people are treated for one or more non-melanoma skin cancers in Australia each year.

Excluding non-melanoma skin cancer, melanoma is the third most common cancer in Australian women and the fourth most common cancer in Australian men. It is the most common cancer in Australians aged 15–44 years. While the five-year relative survival rate for melanoma is 89% for Australian men and 94% for Australian women, unfortunately in 2013 more than 2,000 people in Australia died from skin cancer. Fortunately, most skin cancers can be prevented simply by ensuring good sun protection.

Skin Cancer Action Week 2016 (20–26 November) reminds us of what we can do to ensure good sun protection – slip on sun-protective clothing, slop on SPF30 (or higher) broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen, slap on a broad-brimmed hat, seek shade and slide on sunglasses. Research from the Cancer Council National Sun Protection Survey showed that Australians are at the same risk of being sunburnt at sporting venues as they are at the beach. The research shows a clear link between sporting venues and sun damage, with 22% of Australians at sports grounds and centres getting sunburnt. Other places where a high risk of sunburn was found included public parks and gardens, backyard pools, and at home or a friend's place.

The well-known 'Slip, Slop, Slap' campaign, initiated some 35 years ago, has been recognised as one of Australia's most successful health campaigns. The campaign has more recently been modified to 'Slip, Slop, Slap, Seek and Slide' (referring to seeking shade and sliding on wrap-around sunglasses to prevent sun damage).

A combination of these sun protection measures along with getting to know your skin and regularly checking so you can pick up on any changes are the keys to reducing skin cancer risk.

Skin cancer (including both melanoma and non-melanoma) is the most common cancer in Australia, with melanoma the most deadly form. Not to be understated, there are also other skin cancers which can be malignant and cause painful and disfiguring lesions. New therapies are now available to treat pre-cancerous solar keratosis – more commonly known as sunspots. These spots can vary in appearance, though may appear scaly, rough or wart-like. They are common on sites frequently exposed to the sun, such as the backs of the hands and the face, including the ears, nose, cheeks, upper lip, temples and forehead.

It's important to get to know your own skin and identify sun damage. A first step is to check with your doctor or pharmacist if you have doubts about any changes either in skin appearance or in the colour of moles and freckles. The Cancer Council website also has useful information on checking for signs of skin cancer: <http://www.cancer.org.au/preventing-cancer/sun-protection/check-for-signs-of-skin-cancer.html>

Your local pharmacy is your health destination. You can get more advice on choosing the most appropriate sunscreen and how to be SunSmart this summer from your pharmacist.

You can get more detailed information on how to be SunSmart from the Self Care Fact Card titled *Sense in the Sun* available from pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au/selfcare, then click 'Find a *Self Care pharmacy* near you'.