



Sense in the Sun

Ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun can damage skin and lead to sunburn, premature ageing and skin cancers. Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. It is important, especially during summer, to protect skin from the damaging effects of the sun.

Ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun is made up of UVA, UVB and UVC radiation. All UVC and most UVB radiation is absorbed by the earth's atmosphere. Some UVB and most UVA radiation reaches the earth's surface.



More UVR reaches the earth's surface in the middle of the day; during summer; at high altitudes and close to the equator. Less UVR reaches the earth's surface in the morning and evening, when the sun is closer to the horizon.

High levels of air pollution can reduce the amount of UVR reaching the earth's surface.

UVB radiation is the main cause of skin tanning and sunburn and it contributes to skin cancer.

UVA radiation penetrates deeper into the skin than UV-B and can cause long-term skin damage including wrinkles, blotchiness, sagging and discolouration. It also contributes to skin cancer.

Risks

Both long-term sun exposure and sunburn can lead to permanent skin damage and skin cancer. A tan is a sign of skin damage.

Skin cancer in adults is related to the amount of exposure to UVA and UVB radiation during childhood. It is important to remember that:

- UVA and UVB radiation is strongest and most

dangerous from 10 am to 2 pm (11am to 3pm daylight-saving time)

- Clouds do not block out UVA or UVB radiation
- White surfaces (e.g., cement, sand, snow) and water reflect sunlight and increase exposure to UVA and UVB
- Sunlight passes through water and can burn while swimming
- The sun continues to burn skin even when the wind is cooling
- UV radiation from a solarium is more intense than natural sunlight, emitting radiation up to five times as strong as the midday summer sun.

Anyone's skin can be damaged by the sun, but some people are more at risk, including those who have:

- Fair or sensitive skin
- A family member who has had skin cancer
- A large number of freckles or moles.

Important

Check your skin regularly and consult a doctor 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
- An unusual freckle, mole or spot – look for irregular shape, uneven surface, colour change in the freckle, mole or skin around it.

Most skin cancers can be cured if treated early.

Skin cancers

Melanoma

- The most dangerous skin cancer.
- If treated early, 90% of people with melanoma can be cured.
- May appear as a new spot or an existing freckle or mole that changes colour, size or shape.
- Usually has an irregular or smudgy outline and may be different colours.
- Grows over weeks to months anywhere on the body.
- If untreated, 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 the sun – e.g., back of the hands.
- Grows over some months.

Basal cell carcinoma

- Most common and least dangerous skin cancer.
- Red, pale or pearly in colour.
- Looks like a lump or dry, scaly area.
- May be a sore that doesn't heal properly.
- Grows slowly.
- Usually appears on the head, neck or upper body.

Other skin spots

Sunspots (solar keratosis)

- Red, flat scaling areas which may sting if scratched.
- Appear on skin exposed to the sun.
- Most common in people over 40 years of age.
- A warning that you are prone to skin damage and cancer.

Moles

- Harmless brown and black spots; may be raised.
- Number of moles on skin may increase with sun exposure.

Self care

- Slip on sun- protective clothing. If you have fair skin, wear a shirt while swimming.
- Slap on an SPF 30+ sunscreen. Make sure you apply it properly and regularly.
- Slap on a hat. Wear a wide-brimmed hat when outside.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- Slide on a pair of sunglasses - wrap-around styles are best.
- Plan family outdoor activities to suit the child with the most sensitive skin.
- In summer, encourage indoor activities during the middle of the day.
- Have your skin checked every year for sun damage.
- Avoid tanning with sunlamps or solariums. They also damage your skin.
- Some medicines and cosmetics can make skin more sensitive to the sun - ask a pharmacist.
- Protect your lips with sunscreen all year round, especially if you have ever had a cold sore.

Applying sunscreens

- Use an SPF 30+ broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen.
- Apply 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, in a cool place in the car or in the nappy bag.

For more information

State cancer body – listed under 'Cancer' in the white pages of the phone book

SunSmart – visit www.sunsmart.com.au

Cancer Helpline – phone 131 120

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – telephone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

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

