

Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Australia with about 700,000 cases of skin cancer diagnosed in each year. Skin Cancers form by ultraviolet (UV) radiation penetrating the skin.

Being Sun Smart is just a regular part of life in Australia, however, to Slip Slop Slap Seek and Slide is not enough. Regular skin checks are an important part of sun safety. Regular skin cancer checks will help to detect skin cancers at an early stage and we know that early detection of skin cancers usually means a successful cure.

Unlike many other types of cancer, skin cancer is often visible, making it easier to detect in the early stages. **The most common warning sign of skin cancer is a change on the skin over weeks to months.** Look for a change in border, shape or colour of any spot, scale or lump. Be wary of any spots, which increase in size, which do not match other spots, or which bleed but do not heal. In these cases, you should always seek advice from your GP.

Types of Skin Cancer

The two most common forms of skin cancer are *basal cell carcinoma* and *squamous cell carcinoma*. They usually form on parts of the body that receive sun exposure. They appear as red or pearly spots or lumps, are sometimes scaly, and may bleed or ulcerate.

Basal cell carcinomas are slow growing and seldom spread to other parts of the body. Squamous cell carcinomas also rarely spread, but do so more often than basal cell carcinomas. Both are rarely life threatening, however, early detection is important as they can destroy the tissue surrounding them. A far more dangerous, but much less common, form of skin cancer is *malignant melanoma*. Melanoma can spread to the lymph glands, which can mean the cancer cells have spread to other parts of the body. They appear as a new spot or as a change in an existing freckle or mole and grow over weeks to months anywhere on the body.

The incidence of melanoma has increased over the past decade but survival rates have improved due to early diagnosis of melanoma.

Our Skin Cancer Clinic

A thorough, full head-to-toe skin examination done by a GP trained in skin cancer medicine has the best advantage of helping to detect skin cancer at an early stage, giving you the best chances for a cure.

For this reason, we always prefer to look at your entire body from head to toe. We do not recommend a limited skin check, as we do not want to miss a suspicious skin lesion on another part of the skin. We know that melanoma can form on any part of the skin - not only sun exposed parts. Your doctor will ask you to undress down to your underwear and we will provide you with a modesty sheet.

We use a Dermoscope (digital luminescence light microscopy) which allows the doctor to perform a high-resolution examination of your skin.

The initial head-to-toe skin check is a consultation only. The aim is to detect any suspicious skin lesions and then advise you of the options for diagnosis and treatment. Skin cancer prevention is also emphasized.

Diagnosis and treatment of Skin Cancer

Once your doctor has detected a suspicious lesion, your GP will advise a diagnostic biopsy (sample) of the lesion under a local anaesthetic.

A diagnostic biopsy for a basal cell or squamous cell skin cancer is a punch biopsy. For a melanoma, we take an elliptical excision biopsy with a narrow margin of normal tissue.

The tissue specimen will be sent for histopathological examination. It normally takes seven to ten days to receive the results. If the result confirms that the lesion is a skin cancer then we will discuss a definitive treatment plan. This may involve a second procedure to excise the skin cancer completely, which requires removing a margin of normal skin around the lesion. This aims at a successful cure to avoid skin cancer recurrence or spread.

Costs will involve a theatre fee of \$30.00 for all procedures, which is not claimable by Medicare.

Wound care after surgery

It is important to keep wounds clean and covered. A wound with a moisture layer (from sweat) on the surface will heal much better, and with less scarring, than a dry wound.

After skin surgery, your wound will be dressed the appropriate dressing. Please keep a dressing in place until your review or stitches removal, which will be five to seven days.

Please purchase a dressing from the chemist and change if it daily or it gets wet.

Despite our best efforts to prevent it, wound infection can be inevitable. The best indicator that a wound is infected is increased pain in the site and redness.

If you have any problems with your wound such as increasing pain, redness, oozing or bleeding, then please contact the practice to arrange a review as soon as possible.

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