

UV damage: early detection of skin cancer

The biggest cause of skin cancer is too much exposure to UV light from sunlight or sunbeds. Although skin cancer is one of the most common forms of cancer in the UK, it is also one of the most preventable. Taking steps such as using a high-factor sunscreen, covering up and staying out of direct sunlight can help to prevent sun damage.

There are two main types of skin cancer:

- **Non-melanoma:** the most common type of skin cancer with 210K+ cases diagnosed each year in the UK
- **Melanoma:** the most serious type of skin cancer, with 16K+ cases diagnosed each year in the UK



Around 90% of melanoma skin cancer cases could be prevented by enjoying the sun safely and avoiding sunbeds.

Symptoms of skin cancer can vary and can sometimes look similar to other conditions. It's important to get to know what your skin looks like normally to help you spot any unusual changes. Checking our skin on a regular basis is something we can all do to help detect skin cancer early and provide the best chances for treatment.

Checking for signs of non-melanoma skin cancer

Some common symptoms of non-melanoma skin cancer can include a sore area of skin that:

- Doesn't heal within 4 weeks
- Looks unusual
- Hurts, is itchy, bleeds, crusts or scabs for more than 4 weeks

Find more information about non-melanoma skin cancer symptoms at [Cancer Research UK](#).

Checking for signs of melanoma skin cancer

A common sign of melanoma skin cancer is the appearance of a new mole or a change in an existing mole. Changes to look out for include a mole that's getting bigger, changing shape, changing colour, bleeding or becoming crusty, itchy or sore.

You can use the ABCDE checklist to help you tell the difference between a normal mole and a melanoma:

- Asymmetrical – melanomas usually have 2 very different halves and are an irregular shape
- Border – melanomas usually have a notched or ragged border
- Colours – melanomas will usually be a mix of 2 or more colours
- Diameter – most melanomas are usually larger than 6mm in diameter
- Enlargement or elevation – a mole that changes size over time is more likely to be a melanoma

The [British Association of Dermatologists](#) have provided guidance on how to check your skin. Further information about the symptoms of melanoma skin cancer including visual examples is available on the [NHS website](#).

Sources: Skcin, NHS, Cancer Research UK

When to see your GP

If you notice a change in your skin that isn't normal for you see your GP. This may include changes to a mole, noticing a new mole, or noticing a spot or sore that doesn't heal within 4 weeks (that hurts, is itchy, crusty and scabs over). The symptom may not be related to skin cancer, but it is important to get it checked.

For further advice on staying safe in the sun visit the [NHS website](#). More information about skin cancer and detection is available from [Cancer Research UK](#) and [Skcin](#).