Enjoy the sun but mind your skin

Summer is Here – Protect Your Skin

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Ireland. Over 10,000 new cases are diagnosed in Ireland each year. The two main types are melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer. The numbers are increasing steadily. Skin cancer can be prevented.

Ultraviolet rays (UVA and UVB) from the sun or from sunbeds cause 95% of skin cancers and eye damage including cancer of the eye. UVA also causes skin ageing and UVB causes sunburn.

- Over 75% of the Irish population have the ‘Celtic skin type’. People with this skin type have a fair complexion, light-coloured hair and blue, green or hazel eyes. They freckle and burn easily. They tan with difficulty, or not at all. They are most at risk of skin cancer. People with this skin type should be careful in the sun and protect the skin by covering up and seeking shade. They should also apply a “broad-spectrum” sunscreen that protects against UVA and UVB;
- SPF minimum 30 (protects against UVB)
- Look for these signs 🌞 or ☀️ for UVA protection.

1. **Are you at increased risk of skin cancer?**

A person’s skin type is controlled by their genes. This cannot be changed. The fairer your skin, the more sensible you need to be in the sun. Knowing what skin type you have can help you understand how UV rays will affect your skin. There are six different skin types. Choose the hand colour that is most like yours to know your risk. From the chart you can tell if you are at increased risk of skin cancer.
2. **The UV index tells me when I need to protect myself from the sun**

- The UV index is a good indicator of when the sun is most dangerous. It measures the strength of the sun’s UV rays so that you will know how to protect the skin when outdoors. The higher the UV index, the higher the risk of skin and eye damage. When the UV index is 3 or above, you need to cover up and seek shade. You should also apply a “broad-spectrum” sunscreen that protects against UVA and UVB;
• SPF minimum 30 (protects against UVB)

• Look for these signs 🌞 or 🌞 for UVA protection.

3. Protect Your Skin:

Tips on being sun safe in the sun:

Adapted from: www.who.int/uv / www.bccancer.bc.ca
• **Seek Shade:** UV rays are most intense – between 11am and 3-4pm, so limit sun exposure during this time.

  ▪ **Covering up:** Wear loose long-sleeved shirts and long pants. 95% of UV rays are blocked by cotton. Wear a wide brimmed hat that shades the head, neck, ears and face.

  ▪ **Wear wraparound sunglasses:** that block as close to 100% of UVA and UVB as possible. Sunglasses are just as important for children as they are for adults and can help prevent cataracts later in life.

• **Wear sunscreen:** Use a “broad spectrum” sunscreen a “broad-spectrum” sunscreen that protects against UVA and UVB;

• SPF minimum 30 (protects against UVB)

• Look for these signs ☀️ or ☀️ for UVA protection. Apply 20 minutes before going out in the sun and reapply every two hours - more often after swimming or perspiring. The amount of sunscreen that’s needed to cover the body of an average adult is around 35mls or six full teaspoons of lotion. This is more than a half a teaspoon of sunscreen to each arm and face/neck (including ears) and just over one teaspoon to each leg, front of the body and back of the body.

**Sunscreen use alone is not adequate protection against UV rays.**

  ▪ **Know your skin type**

  ▪ **Know the UV index today**

  ▪ **Keep babies under six months out of direct sunlight**

**4. Know your moles**

Melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer. Every year, over 900 new cases of melanoma are diagnosed in Ireland. It is the third most common cancer diagnosed in the 15-44 year age group. A melanoma can occur anywhere but for women, most melanomas are found on the legs, and in men the back is the most common area.
A history of sunburn early in life increases the risk of melanoma. When caught early this type of cancer can be treated effectively. However, if left untreated, melanoma can spread to other parts of the body.

There are many factors that increase the risk of someone developing a melanoma. These are;

- Abnormal moles
- A large number of moles (>50)
- Fair complexion e.g. fair skin, blue eyes, red/blonde hair
- A previous melanoma or other non-melanoma skin cancer
- Immunosuppression, for example, a person who has had a transplant or is on immunosuppressive medication.
- A family history of melanoma
- History of childhood sunburn
- Sun bed exposure

Melanoma may appear as a new mole or spot, or it can be a change to a mole you’ve had for sometime. The ‘ABCDE’ rule can help you to remember the different changes to look out for.

**The ABCDE signs of melanoma**

![Asymmetry](image1.png)

**Asymmetry** - the two halves may not match

![Border](image2.png)

**Border** - Edges may be uneven and ragged

![Colour](image3.png)

**Colour** - Mole may have many colours
When should you see your GP?

See your GP if you notice any unusual skin changes, if you have a wound that does not heal, or if you notice a mole changing in size, shape, feel or colour. Treatment is more likely to be successful if skin cancer is discovered early. Some other changes to watch out for include:

- a spot, mole or sore that itches or hurts,
- a mole or growth that bleeds or scabs.

Check your skin regularly. Know what your moles look like. This can be carried out using a hand held mirror. The entire body should be checked, from the soles of the feet to the scalp.

5. Dangers of sunbeds
The Public Health (Sunbeds) Act 2014 came into force from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} March 2015. This act prohibits the use, hire or purchase of sunbeds for under 18s along with a wide range of other measures related to the provision of sunbeds to the public.

In Ireland, approximately 900 melanomas are diagnosed every year. Over the next 20 years the number of new cases will triple in men and double in women. These cancers can be prevented by taking care in the sun and never using a sunbed.

People who use sunbeds before the age of 35 increase their risk of getting melanoma by 75%. Sunbed use is also linked to an increased risk of developing melanoma of the eye. The number of young adults using sunbeds has been increasing. This trend is especially dangerous for the ‘celtic skin type’ as 75% of people with this skin type have fair skin that burns easily and does not tan, thereby making them more susceptible to developing skin cancer.

The legislation aims to protect children from skin cancer. Children are more sensitive to the damaging effects of ultraviolet radiation. Sunbeds emit up to 12 times more UV rays than the hottest sun.
There is nothing healthy about using a sunbed

Source: www.cancer.ie
6. Vitamin D and Sun Exposure – A Balanced Approach

Vitamin D is essential for bone health. It is present in foods such as eggs, fatty fish, fortified cereals, fortified milk, cheese and margarine spreads. Sun exposure is a major source of vitamin D but UV radiation is the main cause of skin cancer. Therefore it is important to balance the risks of developing skin cancer from too much sun exposure while maintaining adequate vitamin D levels.

The amount of time needed in the sun to make enough vitamin D varies from person to person. Many factors affect the ability of our skin to make vitamin D, such as skin type, amount of skin exposed, season, where we are in the world, time of day, and sunscreen use. Midday UV rays are the most intense. Cloudy days, shade, and having dark-coloured skin reduce the amount of vitamin D the skin makes. People living in higher latitudes may have insufficient UV exposure in winter-time for vitamin D.

Despite the importance of the sun for producing vitamin D, it is sensible to limit exposure of skin to sunlight so as to lower the risk for skin cancer. Overall most people should be able to make enough Vitamin D from short, casual sunlight exposure, for example 10-20 minutes exposure to the face and hands in summer time is considered sufficient. Skin should not have to redden or burn to make enough vitamin D. There is no evidence that sunscreen use adversely affects vitamin D status. For the general population with no specific medical issues or risk factors for vitamin D deficiency, supplementation is not necessary and is not recommended.

Spending hours in the sun with the aim for making Vitamin D is a pointless exercise as, when the body has made sufficient Vitamin D, the production process simply switches off and any extra is excreted. But spending longer in strong sun will increase your risk of skin cancer.

People who are most likely to be lacking in vitamin D include:

- People with naturally brown or black skin, for example people of African, Afro-Caribbean or South Asian family origin
• People over the age of 65
• Pregnant and breastfeeding women
• Babies
• People who are housebound or confined inside for long periods of time, for example in hospital

People within these groups may need to take vitamin D supplements.

Enjoying the sun safely, while taking care not to burn, should help most people get a good balance. People should not have to redden or burn to make enough vitamin D.

7. Your top tips for enjoying the sun safely

• Don’t get sunburnt
• Know your skin type
• Know the UV index
• Cover up and seek shade
• Apply “broad-spectrum” sunscreen that protects you against UVA and UVB; SPF 30+ (protects against UVB) and look out for these signs or for UVA protection.
• Protect yourself even on cool and cloudy days
• Be aware that water and concrete reflect the sun’s rays increasing exposure to UV rays
• You should not have to redden or burn to make enough vitamin D
• Never use a sunbed