



Health & Wellbeing Bulletin

Sun Smart Bulletin – June 2010

Skin cancer is by far the most common cancer in Ireland. The good news is that you can greatly reduce your risk simply by being safe in the sun.

Can tanning protect me from skin cancer?

Tanning is your body's attempt to protect itself from ultraviolet damage to your skin. Tanned skin can still burn if it is exposed to sunlight and is caused by ultraviolet damage to the skin, so it puts you at risk for skin cancer.

How serious is sunburn?

Sunburn is caused by exposure to UV radiation, mainly UVB radiation. When the skin is damaged by UVB, one of three things can happen.

1. The damaged cells try to repair the damage. At the same time, chemicals are released, which cause the underlying blood vessels to swell. This is what is known as sunburn. In severe cases the skin may blister. Sunburn can happen in as little as 15 minutes. It will continue to develop over 24-72 hours after your skin is exposed to the sun.
2. The damage may be so extensive that the cells cannot repair themselves, so they die.
3. The damaged cells are inaccurately repaired. This will result in an error-producing piece of DNA, which is passed on when the cells are dividing. This is the most serious situation as it can contribute to the development of cancer.

Eventually your sunburn fades, but any damage to your skin's cells lasts much longer. All types of sunburn, whether serious or mild, cause permanent damage. So sunburn in childhood is an important risk factor for developing skin cancer in later life.

How can I treat sunburn?

Sunburn is usually very painful. It is most likely that your skin will peel. This is how your body gets rid of some of the damaged cells. Below is a list of some important steps to follow if you do have sunburn.

- Stay out of the sun completely until the redness has disappeared.
- Go to your pharmacy for a sunburn treatment.
- Drink plenty of water.
- When the pain begins to disappear, apply a moisturising cream to keep the burnt area moist.

If you have severe sunburn, headaches, nausea, vomiting or dizziness, go to your GP.

Staying Safe in the Sun

It's important to take particular care if you:

- Have pale and freckled skin that doesn't tan or burns before it tans
- Have red or fair hair and light coloured eyes
- Have a large number of moles (50 or more)
- Burn easily, have a history of sunburn or have already had skin cancer.

Prevent sun damage by:

- Covering up. Wear a wide brimmed hat and a t-shirt.
- Wear sunglasses. A good pair of sunglasses will help protect your eyes from the sun.
- Stay in the shade between the hours of 11.00 am to 3.00 pm when the sun is at its strongest.
- Use sunscreen of sun protection factor (SPF) 15 or higher, with UVA and UVB protection and re-apply every two hours or more often when swimming or exercising.

Be extra careful with children as:

- Children's skin is very sensitive to the sun's rays.
- It is essential that they wear appropriate cover-up clothing and sunscreen.
- A hat with a brim to cover their face.
- A loose fitting t-shirt with collar and sleeves.
- If they are out in the sun between 11.00am and 3.00pm, they should wear a sunscreen of at least SPF 15 with UVA and UVB protection.

Checking your skin/Early Detection

Everyone should know what their skin is like. But it's especially important if you have moles on your skin. A good way to check your moles is with a mirror. This can help you detect malignant melanoma early. Early detection gives you a better chance of recovery.

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For further information on QUINN-healthcare's Health@Work Services please call 1890 907 088 or email och@quinn-healthcare.com

Did you know?

- Ireland has among the highest skin cancer rates in Europe.
- Two-thirds of Irish people have a higher risk of developing Skin Cancer because of their skin type.
- 90% of all skin cancers are preventable
- Damage to the skin by the sun is permanent. In later life this can lead to skin cancer.
- For the majority of the population, 10-15 minutes daily exposure of the face and hands to the sun and adequate diet provides a sufficient level of vitamin D.
- Skin damage is caused by exposure to ultraviolet rays, which are strongest from 11am to 3pm.
- The number of skin cancer cases is rising every year.