



Medicine for Managers

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Here Comes The Sun

Summer's here and we all want to get out into the sun. It makes us feel good and can make us look good as well. People who are well tanned are viewed as healthy but, unfortunately, it isn't as simple as that. Repeated exposure to the sun, or indeed to a tanning booth, can lead to skin changes which accelerate the aging process and can predispose the skin to a variety of changes including skin cancers.

"Here Comes The Sun" was a song written by the Beatles' George Harrison and appeared on the 1969 Album *"Abbey Road"*. The song itself is cheerful and upbeat, but the effects of the sun itself are not so carefree.

Apart from the obvious cosmetic disadvantages of long-term sun exposure, other changes develop including patchy mottling, visible dilated blood vessels, benign tumours and, most significantly, skin cancers.

As we get older our skin progressively changes as the elastic fibres in the skin gradually break down. As it deteriorates the skin loses its elasticity and begins to stretch and sag.

The shape is lost so that skin starts to hang in places. These changes are aggravated by the ultra-violet rays of the sun.

If a pigmented mole is present, place a measuring tape next to it and take a photograph. Check the photograph against the actual mole using the same measure every 3-6 months to ensure it has not changed.

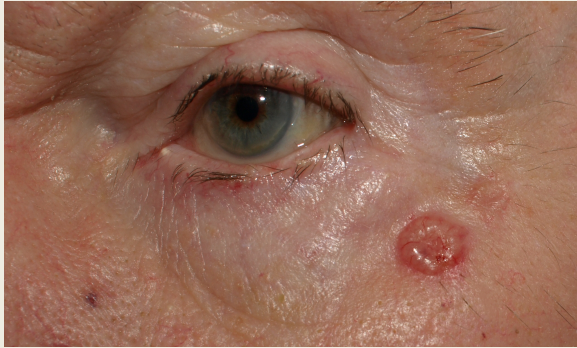
Although sun damage is not apparent in young people, the effects are cumulative and, with increasing age the skin adopts its characteristic wrinkled, freckly and coarse appearance. The skin also becomes more fragile, suffering damage with minor trauma, tearing and bruising easily.

Ultra-violet light is the principal culprit, either from sun or tanning beds. Ultra-violet rays can cause sunburn. The body does have a protective mechanism and will produce the pigment *melanin*, which absorbs ultra-violet rays and helps to protect against sinister skin changes.

The skin becomes darker as more melanin accumulates but this in itself does indicate that the skin has become damaged by the sun or tanning bed. Pale skinned people have little melanin and are more vulnerable to skin damage resulting in burning and predisposition to cancer.

There are three principal types of skin cancer. Basal cell carcinomas are usually slow growing,

enlarge by direct extension and virtually never metastasise (spread through the blood or lymph channels).



They are believed to be the result of long term exposure to ultraviolet light from the sun. In general they are managed by total removal (excision) and to do so usually effects a cure.

Squamous cell carcinomas often enlarge more quickly and can spread by local growth or by metastasising. A significant factor for their formation is also exposure to ultra-violet light. In general they are less well defined than basal

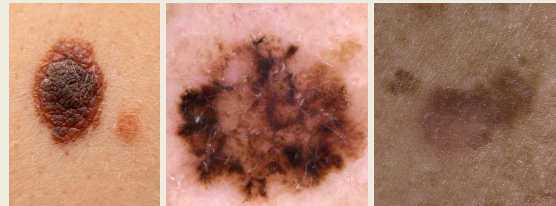


cell tumours, with indistinct margins and a variety of clinical appearances which may be scaly, ulcerated, flat or raised and pale or coloured.

Together the two groups form 95% of all skin cancers.

The third type is the melanoma. This tumour is made up of malignant melanocytes and, although comprising less than 5% of skin

cancers, is responsible for up to 75% of all deaths. About 9 in 10 of all patients now survive a melanoma for more than five years and about two-and-a-quarter thousand die of the disease each year. The tumour spreads to distant organs and secondary tumours may develop when the primary pigmented lesion is still quite small.



Their appearance may be very variable.

Everyone should check their skin regularly and use the ABCD rule with any pigmented skin lesion;

Asymmetry (variation in the shape or characteristics),

Border (indistinct or ragged edges),

Colour (variation in shade or intensity), and

Diameter (significant change in size, greater than 5 mm). Any skin lesion which changes in any way (including pain or bleeding) should be shown to a doctor as a matter of urgency.

It is important to protect the skin from the sun's rays to avoid sunburn. Always remember:

- Never allow the skin to burn
- Cover yourself (which is counter-intuitive when lying on a beach but may be essential for protection)

Use an appropriate sunscreen. Sunscreens protect against UVB and UVA rays. The sun protection factor (SPF) should be *at least* 30 for

protection against UVB and the higher the number the better. UVA protection is measured using a 1-5 star rating and it should be at least four stars. Sunscreen should be seen purely as a protection rather than as a way to enable someone to stay longer in the sun.

Light skinned people and those with lots of moles or freckles are more vulnerable because of the increased risk of skin cancer.

They should try to stay in the shade and to use clothing as well as sunscreen for protection. All people should take time in the shade during the period 11.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.

A good piece of advice is to apply sunscreen **twice** before going out; thirty minutes before and again immediately before.

If sitting on the beach and using a sunscreen, it is important to remember that swimming can wash off sunscreen and it is important that it is reapplied after coming out of the water.

The eyes should be protected from the sun. Spending some hours at the beach on a bright hot day may result in a burn to the eye surface. More permanent eye damage can occur as well.

The sun is great and the brightness, warmth and all that goes with it can make us all feel better.

However, ultra-violet rays is the demon that lurks with it and can do so much cosmetic and physical damage.

The sun should be enjoyed but everyone should remember the precautions to avoid it all ending in tears. Have a great summer!

Always take extra care in the sun if:

- You have pale skin
- You have lots of freckles or have moles
- If you burn very easily, rather than tanning
- If you are not exposed regularly to sun
- If there is a family history of skin cancer

Moles should be regularly inspected and any new mole or an existing one which undergoes any change should be shown to a doctor as soon as possible.

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