

# SUN AWARENESS



WATCH YOUR HEALTH

Enjoying the summer sunshine both at work and at home supports our bodies to provide much needed vitamin D. However extensive exposure can lead to numerous health concerns such as: cellular damage; cataracts; early aging; actinic keratoses (potential cancerous cells) and skin cancer itself (non-melanoma and melanoma) which is now the most commonly diagnosed cancer registering 100,000 new cases a year and claiming 2,500 lives each year in the UK alone.

**FACT: There are 6 annual global fatalities from shark attacks compared to 48,000 from skin cancer.**

## Signs of sun damage

- Suntanned skin – although this is not always seen as sun damage, having a tan from being exposed to UV rays means that the top layer of your skin has been injured.
- Sunburn – most common sign of sun damage, sunburn can be painful and take several weeks to fade. Sunburn affects only the outer layer of the skin and is classed as a first degree burn.
- Severe sunburn – classed as second degree burns, is very painful and the skin will blister and swell to produce moisture and protection. This can lead to infection and you must seek medical advice.
- Sun spots/uneven skin tone – sun damage affects skin pigmentation leaving some areas lighter and others darker on our skin.
- Dry/chapped lips – sore, swollen or dry skin on the lips.

## Results of sun damage

- Aging – more than 80% of early aging in adults is due to the suntans they had as teenagers. This can result in wrinkles and grey age spots which develop over time.
- Cataracts – although painless, this ‘cloudy area’ in the lens of the eye can seriously affect your eyesight which, in many cases, is only treatable through surgery.
- Skin cancer – non-melanoma skin cancers are the most common (affecting slightly more men than women), the earliest signs are firm, red lumps and flat, scaly patches on the skin that do not heal. Melanoma skin cancers spread to other organs, early signs are a new mole or changes in existing moles. There is a higher risk of melanoma cancer if you have moles/freckles, red/blonde hair, pale skin and if there have been other cases in your family.

**Medical Treatments:** For the serious results of sun damage, it is vital that you seek medical advice and treatment as soon as possible. Treatment for non-melanoma skin cancer is generally successful in 90% of cases as there is a lower risk that it will spread to other parts of the body. Melanoma is slightly different, if the skin cancer is treated at an early stage, surgery can be successful; however, if it is not treated until melanoma is in its advanced stages then chemotherapy medicines can be used to slow spread of the cancer, but not treat it entirely. Skin cancer can also return if you’ve suffered from it before.

**Everyone is at risk:** Harmful UV rays can affect everyone, but there are some factors which can increase the chances of sun damage: **pale skin; red/blonde hair; blue eyes; older age; mole/freckles; previous burns; radiotherapy treatment; weak immune system; previous skin cancer.** Care must also be taken with young children in the sun as sun damage can have serious immediate and long term effects.

Protecting yourself and your family from the sun on holiday is an obvious and conscious choice we all make, however it can be just as easy to be affected by UV rays in the UK without realising. Whether it is working outside in short sleeved clothing or enjoying lunch in the sun, precautions still need to be taken even if there are clouds in the sky.

**Sun protection at work:** If you are working outside on a regular basis you can protect yourself from the sun with UV protection sunglasses and sun cream (minimum of SPF 15) if certain activities allow short sleeved garments. It may sometimes be unavoidable to stay out the sun between the hours of 11am – 3pm when you are working, so it is essential that you reapply sun cream at least every 2 hours.

**Sun protection on holiday:** When on holiday it is important to try and stay out of the sun at midday. Care must also be taken to reapply sun cream with a suitable SPF every 2 hours and to be aware that it may need to be reapplied after swimming or if you have been out of the sun for a long while.

Further information:

<http://www.webmd.boots.com/melanoma-skin-cancer/ss/slideshow-sun-damaged-skin>

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cancer-of-the-skin/Pages/Introduction.aspx>



Protect yourself in five ways from skin cancer

## HEALTH ESSENTIALS