



Ultraviolet radiation and the INTERSUN Programme

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Skin cancers



How common is skin cancer?

The incidence of both non-melanoma and melanoma skin cancers has been increasing over the past decades. Currently, between 2 and 3 million non-melanoma skin cancers and 132,000 melanoma skin cancers occur globally each year. One in every three cancers diagnosed is a skin cancer and, according to Skin Cancer Foundation Statistics, one in every five Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime.

As ozone levels are depleted, the atmosphere loses more and more of its protective filter function and more solar UV radiation reaches the Earth's surface. It is estimated that a 10 per cent decrease in ozone levels will result in an additional 300,000 non-melanoma and 4,500 melanoma skin cancer cases. The global incidence of melanoma continues to increase – however, the main factors that predispose to the development of melanoma seem to be connected with recreational exposure to the sun and a history of sunburn. These factors lie within each individual's own responsibility.

Questions

1. What are the different types of skin cancer?
2. How common is skin cancer?
3. Who is most at risk of getting skin cancer?

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Skin cancers



Who is most at risk of getting skin cancer?

Due to their relative lack of skin pigmentation Caucasian populations generally have a much higher risk of getting non-melanoma or melanoma skin cancers than dark-skinned populations. Naturally brown and black people (skin types V, VI – see table) can usually safely tolerate relatively high levels of sun exposure without getting sunburnt or greatly increasing their skin cancer risk. In contrast, people with pale or freckled skin, fair or red hair and blue eyes belong to the highest risk group (skin types I, II); people with dark hair and eyes who do not normally get sunburnt are at medium risk of developing skin cancer (skin types III, IV). Nevertheless excessive exposure to intense sunlight can damage all skin types - the risk of eye damage and heat stroke is the same for everyone!

Some individual risk factors for skin cancer

- fair skin
- blue, green or hazel eyes
- light-coloured hair
- tendency to burn rather than suntan
- history of severe sunburns
- many moles
- freckles
- a family history of skin cancer

Skin type classification	Do you burn in the sun?	Do you tan after having been in the sun?
I	Always	Seldom
II	Usually	Sometimes
III	Sometimes	Usually
IV	Seldom	Always
V	Naturally brown skin	
VI	Naturally black skin	

How can I protect myself against skin cancer?

– See detailed information on individual protection against UV





Key statistics for melanoma skin cancer

Cancer of the skin is by far the most common of all cancers. Melanoma accounts for only about 1% of skin cancers but causes a large majority of skin cancer deaths.

How common is melanoma?

The American Cancer Society's estimates for melanoma in the United States for 2016 are:

- About 76,380 new melanomas will be diagnosed (about 46,870 in men and 29,510 in women).
- About 10,130 people are expected to die of melanoma (about 6,750 men and 3,380 women).

The rates of melanoma have been rising for the last 30 years.

Risk of getting melanoma

Melanoma is more than 20 times more common in whites than in African Americans. Overall, the lifetime risk of getting melanoma is about 2.5% (1 in 40) for whites, 0.1% (1 in 1,000) for blacks, and 0.5% (1 in 200) for Hispanics. The risk for each person can be affected by a number of different factors, which are described in [Risk factors for melanoma skin cancer](#).

The risk of melanoma increases as people age. The average age of people when it is diagnosed is 63. But melanoma is not uncommon even among those younger than 30. In fact, it's one of the most common [cancers in young adults](#) (especially young women).

Also see [melanoma survival statistics, by stage](#).

Visit the [American Cancer Society's Cancer Statistics Center](#) for more key statistics.

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