

Skin Cancer Awareness Month

May 1, 2023 - May 31, 2023

What is Skin Cancer Awareness Month?

Skin Cancer Awareness Month, also known as Melanoma Awareness Month is a yearly event that aims to raise awareness about the dangers of too much exposure to the sun and how to protect your skin. UV rays from the sun are one of the main causes of skin cancer, and so it's really important to educate people about how to protect themselves when spending time in the sun. Another aim of the event is to teach people how to check their skin for signs of melanoma, and to encourage that people do this regularly. This is important because skin cancer is very treatable when caught early!

When is Skin Cancer Awareness Month?

May is Skin Cancer Awareness Month every Year.

What is Melanoma?

Melanoma is a type of cancer that grows on the skin, but it can also spread to other parts of the body if left untreated. There are also other types of skin cancer, including Non-Melanoma Skin Cancer. Non-Melanoma skin cancer is more common, but less dangerous than Melanoma.

What causes a Melanoma?

Melanoma is caused abnormally developing skin cells. Damage caused to the skin by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun is one of the most common causes of skin cancer. As well as natural sunlight, sunbeds are also known to be damaging to the skin, and regular sunbed use also puts you at a greater risk of developing a melanoma.

Sudden and intense exposure to the sun is the most dangerous, which is why sunburn and sunbeds are particularly bad for your skin. There are other factors that can put at a higher risk of skin cancer. These are:

- Having pale skin that burns easily.
- Skin with lots of moles or freckles.
- Red or blonde hair.
- If someone in your close family has had melanoma.

Who is affected by Skin Cancer?

Approximately 16,000 new cases of melanoma are diagnosed every year and more than 1 in 4 skin cancer cases are diagnosed in people under 50 which is a lot younger than the average figures for most other types of cancer.

The increased popularity of tanning culture is thought to play a part in the number of younger people contracting melanoma. Intense exposure to sunlight whilst on holiday, and the use of tanning beds are very damaging to the skin and this damage can cause a melanoma to form.

How to protect yourself from Skin Cancer

It's not always possible to prevent Melanoma, but there are ways to protect your skin, and in doing so reduce your chances of developing skin cancer.

- Firstly, it's very important to avoid getting sunburned! That means wearing an SPF (Sun Protection Factor) sunscreen of at least 15 or 30 every day. Yes, every day! Dermatologists now recommend daily use of SPF as one of the best ways to protect your skin wherever you are in the world. That means cold countries and hot countries, in winter and summer.
- It's particularly important to wear a high SPF when you're in the sun on a hot sunny day. SPF 50 is recommended when in strong direct sunlight, and especially if you have pale skin or any moles. Whether you're sunbathing, gardening or playing games in the sun, remember to apply an SPF sunscreen before you go outside and to reapply it regularly once you're in the sun.
- Clothing is another thing that you can use to protect yourself from the sun. Dark clothes absorb sunlight, so light colours will keep you cooler. But covering your body with clothes will also shield you from the sun's harmful rays!
- As we've discussed, sunbeds can be very dangerous and are thought to be linked to the high numbers of melanoma amongst younger people. That's why you should avoid using them at all costs. If you'd still like to get tanned, then a safer method is using self tan or fake tan! There are hundreds of different brands available that you can try that are tailored to suit different types of skin. Why not try one of these instead of a sunbed?
- One of the key aims of Skin Cancer Awareness Month is to teach people how to check their skin for signs of skin cancer, and to encourage everyone to do this regularly. Checking your skin will help you spot any skin cancer early on. The earlier that skin cancer is caught the better the chances are of successful treatment!