

# Non-melanoma Skin Cancer

What you should know



# What is non-melanoma skin cancer?

Non-melanoma skin cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal skin cells. It develops most often on the outer layer of the skin that is exposed to the sun. Non-melanoma skin cancer is the most common cancer in Ireland. It can usually be cured if it's found and treated early. That is why it's important to protect your skin and know the symptoms.

Non-melanoma skin cancer is not the same as melanoma skin cancer. If you want to know about melanoma, which is a rarer type of cancer, see our leaflet *Melanoma Skin Cancer: What you should know*.

## What increases my risk of non-melanoma skin cancer?

- **UV rays:** Frequent and intense exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays from sunlight (or tanning lamps and sun beds) greatly increases your risk of non-melanoma skin cancer. Skin cancer usually forms in skin that has been exposed to sunlight, either over the long term or with short periods of intense sun exposure and burning. Skin cancer can also occur anywhere on the body.
- **Personal history:** Severe sunburn or blistering as a child or adolescent may increase your risk of developing non-melanoma skin cancer later in life. People who work outside such as farm workers, gardeners and building site workers are also at an increased risk of non-melanoma skin cancer.

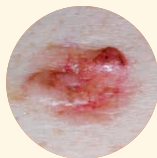
- **Sunbeds:** Sunbeds are as cancer-causing as tobacco and plutonium. Using a sunbed, even just once, can increase your risk of developing some skin cancers by as much as 67%. Regularly using sunbeds and using them from a young age increases your risk even more.
- **Unusual moles:** Your risk is increased if you have unusual moles or lots of moles.
- **Skin type and eye colouring:** You are more at risk if you are fair skinned with fair or red hair and blue, green or grey eyes.
- **Previous skin cancer or skin cancer in the family:** Having either non-melanoma or melanoma skin cancer means that you have a higher risk of getting non-melanoma cancer in the future. If your parent, brother, sister or children have had skin cancer, your risk is also higher.
- **Skin conditions:** People with certain skin conditions can be more likely to develop skin cancer. These include eczema and psoriasis and rare inherited conditions. For example, Xeroderma Pigmentosum, Gorlin's Syndrome and Epidermolysis Bullosa.
- **Chronic inflammation:** For example, leg ulcers, burns or scars can increase your risk.
- **Age:** The risk of developing non-melanoma skin cancer increases with age. But skin cancers can develop in younger people too.
- **Birthmarks:** Some rare birthmarks can increase the risk of skin cancer. Most birthmarks, including port wine stains and strawberry marks, do not increase your risk.
- **Weakened immune system:** If you have a weakened immune system, your risk of skin cancer in the future is increased. For example, if you have had an organ transplant or have HIV/AIDS.
- **Previous radiotherapy:** People who have had radiotherapy can be at risk of skin cancer as much as 15 to 20 years later.
- **Chemicals:** Working with particular chemicals can increase your risk of skin cancer. These include coal tar, creosote, petroleum products like motor oil, and arsenic.

**Risk factors increase your chance of getting non-melanoma skin cancer. Having a risk factor doesn't mean you will get non-melanoma skin cancer.**

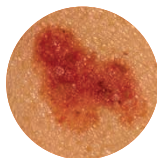
## What are the signs of non-melanoma skin cancer?

A new or changing mark on your skin can be a sign of skin cancer. Here are some examples:

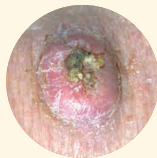
- A small lump that is smooth, pearly or waxy



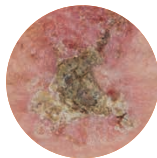
- A flat, red spot that is scaly, crusty or bleeding



- A lump that is firm, scaly or has a crusted surface, and may be sore



- Rough, scaly, irregular patches



These symptoms can be caused by other things, but you should always get them checked. Spots and sores are common. But if you have a spot or sore that looks unusual, or broken skin (an ulcer) that doesn't heal within 4 weeks, get it checked. Also get any new or changing mark on your skin checked.

# What should I do if I have any symptoms?

If you have any changes in your body that you are worried about, it's important to have them checked by your GP (family doctor). The chances are it will not be cancer. Getting your symptoms checked is not wasting anyone's time. The sooner cancer is found and treated, the more likely you are to recover from it.

## How is non-melanoma skin cancer diagnosed?

Your doctor can refer you for more tests to see if the skin change is cancer. For example:



**Skin examination:** A doctor examines the abnormal skin to see if it is harmless or not.



**Excision biopsy:** A doctor removes the abnormal skin by excision (small cut), usually with a local anaesthetic. The skin cells removed ('biopsy') are sent to a laboratory to be examined under a microscope to see if there are cancer cells. The biopsy should also remove normal-looking skin around the affected area. This is to make sure that no cancer cells are left behind. If done early, an excision biopsy often removes all the cancer, so you won't need further treatment.

**If you are diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer, read our booklet, *Understanding Non-melanoma Skin Cancer*. There is a different booklet available for patients diagnosed with melanoma, *Understanding Melanoma Skin Cancer*.**

## How can I reduce my risk of non-melanoma skin cancer?



Don't underestimate the power of the Irish sun!



Avoid getting sunburned



Do not use sunbeds



Regularly check your skin for changes

## Follow the SunSmart Code



SHADE



COVER UP

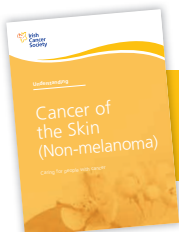


SUNGLASSES



SUNSCREEN

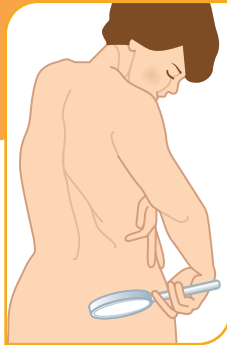
Remember to protect your skin, even on cool or cloudy days. See the end of this leaflet for tips on how to reduce your risk of cancer in general.



If you are diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer, our booklet has more information.

## How can I check myself?

- 1 Examine your body in the mirror. Focus on your front and back, and then check your sides with your arms raised.
- 2 Bend your elbows and look carefully at your forearms, underarms and palms.
- 3 Look at the backs of your legs and feet and the spaces between your toes and soles.
- 4 Examine the back of your neck and scalp with a hand mirror. Part your hair for a closer look.
- 5 Use a hand mirror to look at any areas of your body that are hard to see. If you have trouble checking your skin, ask someone to help you.



Take time today to check your body for changes. Photograph any suspicious skin changes. Date the photo so you can monitor any changes. Talk to your doctor if you notice anything unusual.

## Can I be screened for non-melanoma skin cancer?

Testing for cancer when you have no symptoms is called screening. There is no non-melanoma screening programme in Ireland at present. If you are worried or feel you may be at risk, talk to your doctor.

# 12 ways to reduce your cancer risk



**Do not smoke**



**Avoid second-hand smoke**



**Be a healthy weight**



**Be physically active in everyday life**



**Have a healthy diet**



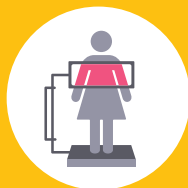
**Avoid alcohol**



**Avoid too much sun**



**Avoid pollutants**



**Get screened for cancer**



**Breastfeed your baby/  
Limit HRT (a hormonal drug for menopausal symptoms)**



**Get vaccinations: Hepatitis B for babies/HPV for older children**



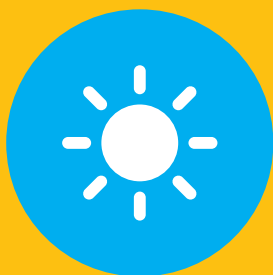
**Find out if you are exposed to radon gas in your area. See [www.epa.ie](http://www.epa.ie)**



# Some facts about non-melanoma skin cancer



Around 12,000 people are diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer every year in Ireland.



9 out of 10 cases of non-melanoma skin cancer are caused by the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays.



Non-melanoma skin cancer usually responds to treatment and rarely spreads to other parts of the body.



## How common is non-melanoma skin cancer?

Around 12,000 new cases of non-melanoma skin cancer are diagnosed each year in Ireland. It is the most common cancer in 15- to 44-year-olds

# More information...

If you are worried or have questions about non-melanoma skin cancer or any cancer:



**Call our Support Line**  
**Freephone 1800 200 700**



or email [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)  
for confidential advice, support and information.

Visit our Daffodil Centres, where our nurses can give you advice about healthy lifestyles and reducing your risk of cancer. To find out where your local Daffodil Centre is, email [daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie](mailto:daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie)

Visit our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) for more information on skin cancer and ways to reduce your risk of cancer.

## Want to stop smoking?

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to reduce your risk of cancer.

If you would like advice or support on quitting, call the HSE Quit Team on CallSave **1800 201 203**, Freetext **QUIT** to **50100** or visit [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie)