

Melanoma Skin Cancer

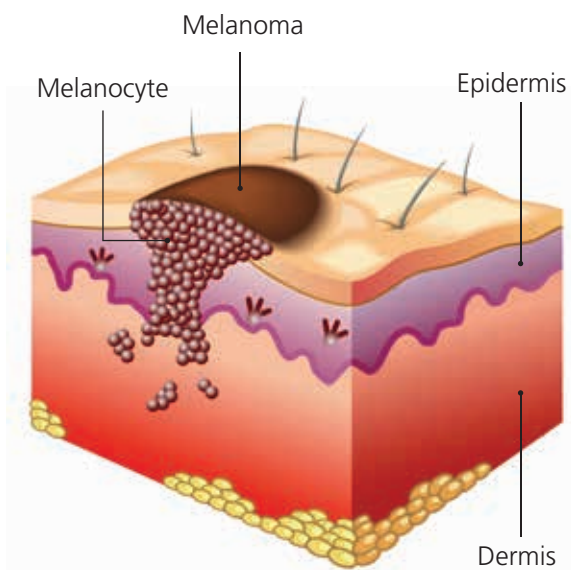
What you should know



What is melanoma skin cancer?

Melanoma is cancer in the skin cells that make melanin. Melanin gives your skin its colour and protects you from ultraviolet (UV) rays present in sunlight.

Melanoma usually starts on the surface of the skin, in moles or normal-looking skin. Rarely melanoma can affect other parts of the body. For example, the eye or the lining of the nose.



What increases my risk of melanoma?

The most common risk factors for melanoma are:

- **A new mole or changes to an existing mole:** For more information see the pictures of moles in this leaflet.
- **Many moles or unusual moles:** Your risk is increased if you have lots of moles or if you have unusually shaped or large moles.
- **Family history:** You are more at risk if you have an immediate family member with a history of melanoma or skin cancer. An immediate family member could be a parent, brother or sister, or children.
- **Skin and hair type and eye colouring:** You are more at risk if you are fair-skinned with fair or red hair, and if you have blue, green or grey eyes.
- **UV rays:** Frequent and intense exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays from sunlight (or tanning lamps and sun beds) greatly increases your risk of melanoma. Being exposed to lots of sun on a beach holiday is more dangerous than daily sun exposure through outdoor work, and so on.
- **Personal history:** Severe sunburn or blistering as a child or adolescent may increase your risk of developing melanoma later in life.
- **Sun beds:** People who have used a sunbed, even once, have a 20% increased risk of melanoma. Regularly using sunbeds and using them from a young age further increases your risk.
- **Age:** Melanoma affects all age groups, but it is most common between the ages of 30 and 60 years. The risk of developing it increases with age.
- **Weakened immune system:** If you have a weakened immune system, your risk of melanoma is greater. For example, if you have had an organ transplant or have HIV/AIDS.
- **Genetic skin disorders:** Your risk is greater if you have a genetic condition that makes your skin more sensitive to sunlight. For example, xeroderma pigmentosum.

Risk factors increase your chance of getting melanoma. Having a risk factor doesn't mean you will get melanoma. Sometimes people with no risk factors may get the disease.

What are the signs of melanoma?

Do you have a mole that has changed in colour, size or shape? Know the warning signs to watch for:

1 Changes in shape

From a round and regular shape to:



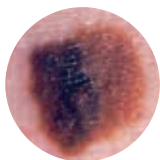
- Ragged edges



- Irregular shape, with one half unlike the other

2 Changes in size

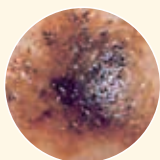
From small (the size of the top of a pencil) to:



- Big (larger than the top of a pencil) and growing or shrinking

3 Changes in colour

Moving from one colour to:



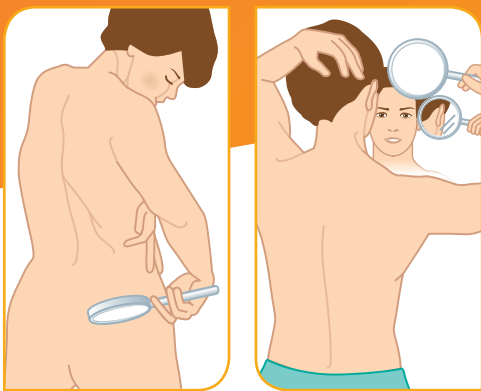
- Many shades of brown or black, sometimes even white, red or blue
- Losing colour

If you notice any of these signs, or have a mole that is tingling, inflamed, oozing, crusty or bleeding, contact your doctor without delay. Also, look out for a dark patch under your nail that gets bigger and wasn't caused by an injury.

These signs can be caused by other things, but always get them checked out. It is normal for moles to grow and develop during childhood and teenage years.

How can I check myself?

- 1 Examine the front and back of your body in the mirror, then right and left sides with arms raised
- 2 Bend elbows and look carefully at palms, forearms and armpits
- 3 Look at the front and backs of legs and feet. Remember soles and between toes
- 4 Examine back of neck and scalp with a hand mirror. Part hair for a closer look
- 5 Use a hand-mirror to check back and buttocks.



Take time today to check your body for changes that could be cancer. Photograph any suspicious moles to track any changes. Talk to your GP (family doctor) if you notice anything unusual.

Can I be screened for melanoma?

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

What should I do if I have any of the signs?

If you have any signs, symptoms or 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 spotted, the more likely you are to recover.

How is melanoma diagnosed?

If you have any unusual skin changes or other symptoms, visit your GP without delay. If your GP suspects a melanoma, they should refer you immediately to a skin specialist, such as a dermatologist or a plastic surgeon.

Tests to diagnose melanoma include:







Skin examination: A dermatologist (skin specialist) examines the area closely to decide if the mole is harmless or not.








Excision biopsy: The suspicious mole is removed (usually with a local anaesthetic) and the cells are examined to see if they are cancerous. If done early, an excision biopsy often removes all the cancer, so you won't need further treatment. The biopsy should also remove 2–3 mm of normal looking skin around the affected area.

How can I reduce my risk of melanoma?

-  Avoid any unnecessary sun exposure, like sunbathing, even if you're using protection
-  Avoid getting burned by the sun
-  Regularly check your skin. If you find any changes go to the doctor immediately
-  Enjoy the sun sensibly and follow the SunSmart code

The SunSmart code

-  **Seek shade:** Avoid the hottest sun of the day from 11am to 3pm
-  **Cover up:** Wear a hat and pick clothes that cover more: shirts with collars, three-quarter length or long sleeves and three-quarter length or long trousers or skirts
-  **Wear sunglasses:** Wear glasses with strong UV protection
-  **Use sunscreen:** Use a broad-spectrum (UVA/UVB) sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 for adults and 50 for children
-  **Check the UV Index:** If it's 3 or more, be SunSmart!

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 melanoma, you can find more information in our booklet.

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



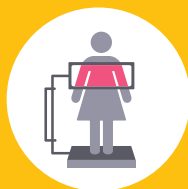
Avoid alcohol



Avoid too much sun



Avoid pollutants



Get screened for cancer



Breastfeed your baby. Limit HRT



Get vaccinations – Hepatitis B for babies/HPV for girls



Find out if you are exposed to radon gas in your area

Some facts about melanoma



Melanoma is different to non-melanoma skin cancer. Non-melanoma skin cancer is more common than melanoma



Melanoma is one of the most serious forms of skin cancer but if spotted early, it is easy to treat



If not treated early, melanoma can spread to other parts of the body and cause serious medical issues



How common is melanoma?

- Around 1,000 people are diagnosed with melanoma in Ireland each year
- Around 10,000 are diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer.

More information

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



Call our Cancer Nurseline
Freephone 1800 200 700



Email cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie
We will provide you with confidential advice, support and information.

Visit our Daffodil Centres, where our nurses can give you advice about healthy lifestyles and how you can reduce your risk of cancer. To find out where your local Daffodil Centre is, email daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie

Visit our website www.cancer.ie for more information on melanoma skin cancer and ways you can 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