



# SKIN CANCER SCREENING

## What is skin cancer?

Skin cancer occurs when there is an abnormal growth of cells. This typically develops on skin exposed to the sun such as the face, nose, and lips. Skin cancer is common in people who spend extended periods of time outdoors in the sun without protective clothing or sunscreen.

## What is a skin cancer screening test?

Skin cancer screening tests can detect the first signs of skin cancer. According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, it is recommended that all adults have a skin cancer screening test once a year and more frequently for those with a history of skin cancer or who are at high risk.

## What causes skin cancer?

Ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun are the primary risk factor for skin cancer. A history of sun overexposure resulting in severe sunburns can actually cause skin cancer later in life. Additional causes of skin cancer include radiation exposure (i.e., from repeated X-RAYS), occupational exposure to chemicals, and lifestyle choices such as tanning beds and tobacco use.

## What are the types of skin cancer?

There are three main types of skin cancer:

1. Basal cell carcinoma
2. Squamous cell carcinoma
3. Melanoma

## What are the symptoms or signs of skin cancer?

Skin cancer typically begins as precancerous changes or lesions on the skin. Some of these lesions include actinic keratoses or abnormal moles. They are often found on the head, neck, and back of hands.

Abnormal moles can be distinguished from normal moles by:

- Asymmetry of pigmentation (half of the mole is one color while the other half is another color)
- Irregular shape
- Variations in color (brown, tan, pink, red)
- Size is greater than that of a pencil eraser (or 6 millimeters)
- Changes in size, color, and shape over time

Be proactive in self-examining your skin and schedule a skin cancer screen with your primary care provider today.



# SKIN CANCER SCREENING

## A note on sunscreens and Vitamin D

Vitamin D is a necessary fat-soluble vitamin important for bone health, immune function, and mineral balance. Low vitamin D levels have been linked to obesity and depression, along with osteoporosis.

It is often termed the sunshine vitamin because it can be made naturally by our skin from sunlight. However, sunscreens block the activation of vitamin D by the sun.

If you have been diagnosed with low vitamin D, you may be wondering how to strike the balance between sun exposure and limiting your risk of skin cancer.

### *Here are a couple of sun safety tips:*

**1. Pick the right time for sun exposure.** Your skin tends to produce vitamin D at its peak when you are outside during the middle of the day. This can look like 10-15 minutes between 11:00 AM and 3:00 PM three times a week.

Because sunscreens with an SPF of 8 or higher have been shown to block vitamin-producing rays from the sun, it is important to devote some time spent in the sun without sunscreen.

A great app and resource is D Minder. This app can be used as a stopwatch to track your daily sun exposure and vitamin D. It also allows you to set a target before your sun exposure session.

**2. Be wary of your skin type.** Lighter skin tones tend to absorb UV rays easier than those with darker skin tones. This is due to the high concentration of melanin found in dark skin tones and may require longer sun exposure to optimize vitamin D activation potential.

**3. Increase exposure.** Exposing one-third of your skin surface area to sunlight during the middle of the day is a good way to get more vitamin D. This would mean wearing shorts and a tank top without sunscreen

**4. Stay safe in the sun.** While the sun's UV rays are essential for making vitamin D, if you are someone who burns easily or is at risk for skin cancer, you should be diligent about applying sunscreen after a dedicated time of unprotected sun exposure.

- Wear a hat to protect the tops of your ears, eyes, and face - these areas are vulnerable to sun damage.
- After 10-15 minutes of unprotected sun exposure, apply sunscreen if you plan to stay in the sun for longer.
- Stick to a broad-spectrum sunscreen that has a minimum SPF of 15. Also, consider more sunscreens that do not contain harmful chemicals (i.e., oxybenzone, octinoxate, homosalate, nanoparticles). These chemicals are dangerous to both your health and the environment. Safer sunscreen ingredients include titanium dioxide and zinc oxide.
- If you are not sure about the safety of your current sunscreen, you can find out by downloading the EWG App. This app allows you to scan the barcode of your sunscreen or the sunscreen you are considering and provides a safety score based on its ingredients.