

Strip, Search and Save!



**Finding melanoma early
can save your life**





Strip, Search & Save!

Kathy Lette - Best Selling Author

Growing up a surfie girl in the Puberty Blues days, our boyfriends would urge us to cut out their names in paper, tape them to our stomachs, then sunbake so we'd get a tan tattoo in the shape of their names. Consequently, if I ever get skin cancer I'll have a melanoma called Bruce.

When it comes to sun worship, we Aussies are devotees. The craving for top-to-toe tans meant that we basted ourselves in baby oils and baked in teeny weeny bikinis. But the worst thing is that we got so much more than we basked for. Three Aussies die a day from melanoma. You could play "join the dots" with my sun spots - and what they'd say is, "You should have worn sunscreen, you bloody idiot!"

We may not be surfie girls any longer, but we can still surf our brain waves. Strip, Search and Save. That's the message. My latest novel is called "*How To Kill Your Husband - and other handy household hints.*"

But if you're still fond of the old bloke, get some melanoma-spotting skills by reading this booklet and then give him the once over regularly. And make sure he does the same for you. The peeling is mutual.

Love Kathy x

Introduction

Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. Almost half of all people who live in Australia their whole lives will develop some form of skin cancer and around 1500 people will die every year.

This booklet explains what you need to do to identify different kinds of skin cancers and to know what to do if you find one. Skin cancer detection doesn't need to be a chore. If you have a partner, it's a healthy lifestyle activity that the two of you can share - it might even be fun! Research shows that men tend to leave their skin cancers too long before going to a doctor. By encouraging him to join you as you 'strip, search and save!' each other, you will be taking positive steps toward a healthy future. If you live alone, there are also some handy hints on how to check your own skin!

Did you know?

- Melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer but 90-95% of cases are treatable if caught early.
- Repeated sunburn, particularly when you were a child, increases your risk of melanoma.
- Melanomas can occur on parts of the body that are difficult to see, even those that haven't been exposed to the sun.
- Some melanomas can become life threatening in as little as six weeks.

Everyone is at risk of skin cancer but some people have a higher level of risk than others. Be extra careful about checking your skin and your partner's if either of you have any of the following:

- Anyone who spent their childhood in Australia.
- A large number of moles.
- Suffered sunburn in the past.
- Fair skin that burns easily, freckles and does not tan.
- Blue or green eyes and/or fair or red hair.
- Been diagnosed with skin cancer (especially melanoma) in the past.
- A family history of skin cancer.

What to look for

The more you examine your skin and your partner's, the more you'll learn about what's normal and what may have changed since you last looked. Everyone is likely to have existing moles, birthmarks, freckles and blemishes on their skin. Get to know these well and you'll be able to tell if they change or if new spots, moles or freckles appear.

Skin Cancer

Melanoma



- Can be fatal. If left untreated can spread to other parts of the body.
- Appears as a new spot, or an existing spot, freckle or mole that changes colour, size or shape.
- Has an uneven or smudgy outline and more than one colour.
- Grows over weeks to months.

Nodular melanoma



- A highly dangerous type of melanoma that grows quickly and can be fatal.
- Can appear as a new small, round lump on the skin and may be black, brown, pink or red in colour.
- Feels firm to the touch and, over time may begin to bleed and crust.

Squamous cell carcinoma



- Not as dangerous but may spread if not treated.
- Spots that develop on the lips or ears have the highest risk of spreading and should be seen by a doctor immediately.
- Appears as a thickened red, scaly spot that may bleed and ulcerate.
- Grows over some months on skin most often exposed to the sun.

Basal cell carcinoma



- Most common and least dangerous skin cancer.
- Appears as a pearly lump or dry area and is red, or pale in colour.
- May become ulcerated, bleed and fail to heal.
- Grows slowly, usually on the head, neck and upper torso.

If you find anything new or different do not delay in showing your GP

Spots that are warning signs

Dysplastic naevi



- A warning that you may be prone to melanoma.
- Often larger moles which usually have irregular borders and patterns and uneven colour with shades of brown and sometimes pink.

Solar keratoses



- Not a skin cancer but a warning that you are prone to developing skin cancer.
- Red flattish, scaling areas which may sting if scratched.
- Appears on the skin most often exposed to the sun like hands and face in the over 40 age group.

**These spots are not skin cancer
but can be a warning sign -
show your GP**

Harmless Spots

Freckles

- Harmless flat usually single coloured (brown) spots that occur on sun exposed sites.
- If a freckle changes in size or colour you should see your doctor.



Moles

- Harmless flat or raised lesions usually with a single colour or only a few shades of brown. They are often regular in shape (oval or round) and have a regular pattern.
- Moles should change only slowly over years. If any sudden changes occur you should see your doctor.



Seborrhoeic Keratoses

- By the age of 60, most people have at least one or two.
- A spot with a very discrete edge that appears to sit up on top of the skin and is rough to the touch.
- Colour varies from pale skin through to brown or black.
- Size varies from a few millimetres to 2 cm.



Remember to check your skin regularly!

Checking your skin... and your partner's!



You should check your skin regularly - a good way to remember is to do a complete check on the first day of every new season. If one of you has been diagnosed with a skin cancer in the past, you may need to check more often. Ask your GP or dermatologist what is right for you.

With a bit of practice most people can complete a check in 15 minutes. Whether you're doing it solo or with a partner, you will need to undress completely and make sure you have good light. If you're checking your own skin, use a full length and hand-held mirror to check the areas you can't see easily. Go through the same checking sequence each time.

Where to look

Head, scalp, neck and ears

- Take an extra close look around the nose, lips, ears and scalp.

Torso - front, back and sides

Arms, hands, fingers and nails

- Remember to look at the spaces between the fingers and the beds of your fingernails.

Buttocks, legs and feet

- Remember to check between toes, under toenails and on the soles of feet.

Ask this question:

Have you noticed itching or bleeding from any of your spots since you last checked?

What to do if you spot something

If you see anything on the skin that has changed in size, shape or colour, itches, or that you do not think was there before, see your GP or a dermatologist as soon as you can. Your GP knows your full history, can examine your skin and advise you what to do next. If you would like a second opinion ask your GP to refer you to a skin specialist such as a dermatologist. Your GP may suggest you see a specialist anyway.

Skin Cancer Clinics

The Cancer Council does not operate or endorse any particular skin cancer clinics. Clinics that promote skin cancer checks are private businesses often run by GPs. The level of expertise available is often hard to tell.

If you do choose to go to a skin cancer clinic, consider the following:

- The qualifications and experience of the person examining you.
- What are the costs involved.

If you are told you have skin cancer make sure you ask:

- What type of skin cancer you have and how extensive it is.
- Whether you need treatment immediately.
- If the person offering the treatment is well trained to do so.
- Whether you will be referred to a dermatologist.
- Whether your GP will be informed.
- Will the clinic provide you with information about skin cancer prevention and follow-up.

More information on skin clinics is available on The Cancer Council NSW website at www.cancercouncil.com.au

Protect yourself in the sun

By following simple sun protection practices everyday, you can protect your skin from further sun damage and reduce your risk of developing skin cancer. It is never too late to start protecting your skin.

Most skin cancers are caused by ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. The UV Index shows the intensity of the sun's UV radiation throughout the day. You can find the SunSmart UV Alert on the weather page of most Australian daily newspapers or go to www.cancercouncil.com.au/sunsmart

Take these simple steps when the SunSmart UV Alert indicates level 3 or above:

- 1.** Stay in the shade whenever you can.
- 2.** Slip on some sun protective clothing - that covers your limbs as much as possible.
- 3.** Slap on a hat with a broad brim to protect your neck and ears.
- 4.** Slop on some sunscreen - make sure it is broad spectrum, water resistant and SPF30+ and put it on 20 minutes before you go outdoors and every two hours afterwards.
- 5.** Slide on some sunglasses - make sure they meet Australian Standard AS1067.

Never use just one form of sun protection.

And remember extra care should be taken between 10am and 2pm (11am to 3pm in daylight savings) when UV index levels reach their peak.

Need more information?

**Call the Cancer Council
Helpline on 13 11 20**

**Visit the Cancer Council website
www.cancercouncil.com.au**