

## Information Sheet

### What is melanoma?

Melanoma is a potentially serious form of cancer, usually starting in the skin. It is most likely to affect those with large numbers of moles, a family history of melanoma and those whose skin is sun-sensitive – which means it burns readily and doesn't tan easily or at all. Melanoma is the UK's fifth most common and most rapidly-increasing cancer, with more than 13,000 new cases every year – a fourfold increase over the past 30 years.

### Why is melanoma on the increase?

The rapid rise is thought to be linked to the increasing exposure of people to ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Melanoma has become so much more common as a result of damage (sunburn) during holidays in the sun, which many people now experience from early on in their lives.

### How can I reduce the risk?

The main thing is to avoid exposing your skin to excessive UV radiation. A moderate quantity of sunshine is beneficial for most people, but overdoing it to the extent of burning (which means any degree of redness), especially when young, can have serious consequences later on. In sunny weather use a UVA+UVB sunscreen, preferably with a sun protection factor of 30 or higher and 5 stars UVA protection and follow the instructions

about repeat applications. Cover exposed skin with clothing and a broad-brimmed hat, protect the eyes with wrap-around sunglasses or avoid direct sunlight altogether by staying in the shade, especially between about 11am and 3pm. And NEVER use sunbeds.

### Advice on checking one's skin

The key is to 'know your own skin': melanoma is mainly a cancer affecting pale skin so the advice is aimed at anyone who has ever burnt in the sun, has red or auburn hair, any freckles, lots of moles or a family history of melanoma. If you have dark skin which never burns and no other risk factor, then – so long as you don't burn – rigorous protective measures are unnecessary except in very sunny places.

Regular checking of the skin is essential. Be on the lookout for a lesion (a patch, spot, lump or other abnormality on any otherwise normal skin) that is:

- *changed – new or altered since you last saw it (don't look for detail; if you can see it has changed just by glancing at it, that's enough)*
- *not going away – once a new lesion has appeared, it remains on the skin for longer than 6-8 weeks*
- *odd-looking (the most crucial test) – it simply seems strange, worries you or appears to be different from other spots on your skin*

If you have an abnormality like this you should get it looked at by a doctor, who may refer you to a specialist, normally a dermatologist. It is vital that the result is a confident diagnosis. 'Looks OK' is not a diagnosis.

## About Melanoma Focus

Formed in 2012, the charity is now the principal UK voluntary organisation dedicated to melanoma fundraising, research and patient issues. We provide information services to the public, patients and carers as well as a network and membership hub for professionals involved with melanoma, including clinicians, researchers, nurses and GPs. We commission and fund research projects under our Patient Impact Programme, to which our fundraising initiatives are dedicated.

## Donating

We can arrange to gift-aided a donation if you let us know your details. To donate please:

- click on the *JustGiving* button on our website ([www.melanomafocus.com](http://www.melanomafocus.com))
- or write a cheque to 'Melanoma Focus' and forward it to:  
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Remember: Full name + Home address + Postcode + ✓ = *giftaid it* [enquiries@melanomafocus.com](mailto:enquiries@melanomafocus.com)

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Queen Anne House, Gonville Place, Cambridge CB1 1ND

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