

Signs and symptoms of skin cancer 🔍

Skin cancers can be grouped into [melanoma skin cancer](#) and [non melanoma skin cancers](#).

Tell your GP if you have any of these symptoms, or if you notice any unusual changes to your skin. When skin cancer is found at an early stage, treatment is more likely to be successful.

Melanoma skin cancer

Melanoma skin cancer is the fifth most common cancer in the UK, with around 17,500 cases diagnosed each year. Some melanomas develop from existing moles, but the rest grow on what was previously normal skin.

✓ The **ABCDE checklist** explains what signs to look for:

Asymmetrical – Melanomas are likely to have an uneven shape.

Border – Melanomas are more likely to have irregular edges (border) that might be blurred or jagged.

Colour – Melanomas are often an uneven colour and contain more than one shade.

Diameter – Most melanomas are more than 6mm wide.

Evolving – Melanomas might change in size, shape or colour. Or you might notice other changes such as a mole bleeding, itching or becoming crusty.



[Learn more about melanoma](#)



Non melanoma skin cancers

There are a few different types of non melanoma skin cancers.

The most common are squamous cell carcinoma and basal cell carcinoma. Rarer types include Merkel cell carcinoma and cutaneous lymphoma.

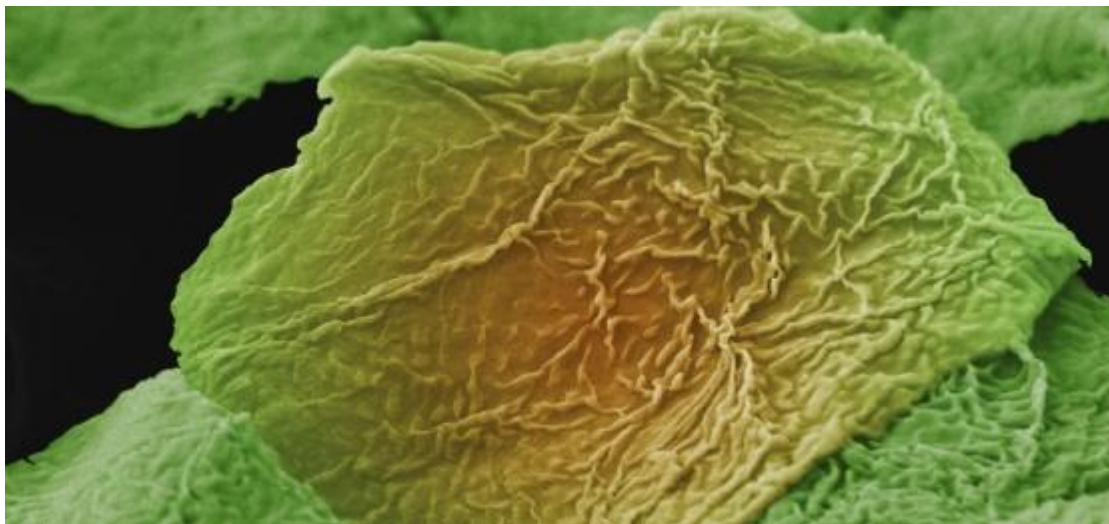
Most non melanoma skin cancers can be cured.

Common symptoms of non melanoma skin cancers include a **sore or area of skin** that:

- 🩹 Doesn't heal within four weeks.
- ❓ Looks unusual.
- 💧 Hurts, is itchy, bleeds, crusts or scabs for more than four weeks.

[Photos of non melanoma](#)

Skin cancer cases are becoming easier to identify



Skin cancer survival increasing, despite record number of cases

Death rates from skin cancer have started to decline. More people than ever are surviving skin cancer thanks to incredible research and improvements in early diagnosis and treatments. This research is only possible thanks to supporters like you.

Justine, who was diagnosed with melanoma skin cancer in 2006 says she “didn’t even consider skin cancer” until she saw a poster on the wall of her doctor’s surgery and recognised her symptoms.

More people being aware of skin cancer symptoms and getting unusual changes checked by their GP could be one reason why **melanoma skin cancer cases in the UK have also reached an all-time high**. In people aged 55 and older, the probability of getting skin cancer has almost tripled since the 1990s.

Image above: Burn damage to skin cell (credit: LRI EM Unit)

[Why are skin cancer cases on the rise?](#)

Staying safe in the sun ☀



Sun safety myths debunked

The most serious type of skin cancer, melanoma, is mostly caused by damage to our skin from the sun. In fact, we know that up to 9 in 10 cases of melanoma skin cancer in the UK can be prevented by being safe in the sun.

There's so much information available to us, and it can get confusing. We've collected some common myths about sun safety to help you avoid misinformation and stay safe in the sun.

'The sun is strongest when it's hottest'

Surprisingly not necessarily. The heat from the sun comes from a type of ray called infrared. Rays from the sun that cause skin damage which can lead to cancer are a different type of ray called ultraviolet (UV) rays. They aren't hot and you can't feel them. This means that UV level can still be high enough to cause skin damage on cloudier or cooler days.

The UV index tells us how strong the sun's UV rays are - so it's always worth checking the weather forecast or the [Met Office website](#). When the UV index is 3 (moderate) or higher, that's when it's most important to take action to protect your skin.

'I've been sunburnt before, so there's no point in protecting myself now - the damage is already done'

Sunburn once every two years can triple the risk of developing melanoma, compared to never getting burnt. This is because not all of the damage is repaired and it builds up over time.

But that means it's never too late to start protecting your skin by seeking shade, covering up, and applying sunscreen regularly. You can stop existing damage from when you've been sunburnt before from building even further.

[More myths disproved](#)



Too much sun exposure is the cause of most skin cancers

Whether you're going abroad, doing the gardening or sitting in the park, it's important to be sun safe. **When the UV level is high, think about protecting your skin by:**

- ☑ **Spending time in the shade**, especially between 11am and 3pm in the UK.
- ∞ **Covering up** with clothes, a wide-brimmed hat and UV protection sunglasses.
- 🧴 **Using a sunscreen with at least SPF15 and 4 or 5 stars**. Use it generously, reapply regularly and use together with shade and clothing.

[Sun, UV and cancer](#)