

Health & Fitness Tips

Skin Cancer - Sun is an enemy

When members are working outdoors protection from the sun is paramount.

Sunburn, skin cancers and other sun related adverse health effects are largely preventable when sun protection is practised early and consistently.

Despite the fact that sun-tanning and burning increase skin cancer risks, most Australians do not protect themselves from the sun's damaging rays.

It is appreciated how uncomfortable working in the heat of the day is, however safety must come first. A T-shirt as minimum should be worn when outdoors, with a hat for further protection and sunglasses to protect the eyes from the glaring sun.

These are common practices in everyday life (or should be, what with climate change being the focus of all discussion groups) and should be adopted when working outdoors as part of every soldier's daily routine. Some of the skin conditions that can occur due to exposure to the sun are:

- **Basal cell carcinomas:**

Basal cell carcinomas usually appear on overexposed skin on the face, ears, lips and particularly the nose. Rarely does basal cell carcinoma result in death, but it can spread and cause more serious health problems.

Basal cell carcinomas can start as a red patch or shiny bump that is pink, red or white. It may be crusty or have an open sore that won't heal.

- **Squamous cell:**

Squamous cell carcinoma is the second most common skin cancer, accounting for about 20 per cent of skin cancers.

Unlike basal cell carcinoma, it is more aggressive and can spread to other parts of the body and may result in death. Because of effective early detection and treatment, basal and squamous cell carcinomas have a cure rate of more than 95 per cent. Squamous cell carcinomas appear as a scaly patch or raised warty growth.

- **Melanoma:**

Malignant melanoma is the most deadly of the three major skin cancers, causing about 75 per cent of skin cancer deaths.

The incidence of melanoma is increasing at a rate faster than that of any other cancer.

Receiving one or two blistering sunburns before the age of 18 at least doubles an individual's risk for developing melanoma.

Melanomas are usually dark brown or black mole-like patches with irregular edges. Melanoma is the most aggressive of the skin cancers. If not caught early, melanoma can spread to other parts of the body and can be fatal. However, when detected early, it is curable.

Melanomas can appear anywhere on the body, even in areas not exposed to the Sun.

- **Eye damage:**

Sunlight is the primary source of UV radiation that can damage tissues of the eye.

Results from dozens of studies suggest that spending long hours in the sun without eye protection increases the chances of developing eye diseases, including cataracts.

Cataracts cause the loss of transparency in the lens, clouding vision. Everyone is at risk of developing cataracts. Another potential effect of UV radiation is a "burning" of the eye surface, called "snow blindness" or photokeratitis, from sunlight.

The effects usually disappear within a couple of days, but may lead to further complications later in life. UV damage to the eyes is also cumulative, so it is never too late for people to start protecting their eyes.

- **What to look for**

Check your skin regularly so you know what is normal for you and what has changed.



Look for:

- Any spot, mole or freckle that has changed shape, size or colour.
- A new spot that is different from other spots around it.
- Any small, dome-shaped lump that wasn't there before.
- A sore that doesn't heal and/or ulcerates or that heals and breaks down again.
- Any spot that you are worried about.

Remember, skin cancer is almost always preventable. Protect yourself from UV radiation this summer by avoiding the midday sun, applying sun protection measures (slip, slop, slap) before spending time outside and see your doctor if you have any concerns about your skin.

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