

Know your skin cancer risks



According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), one in every three cancers diagnosed is a skin cancer. Currently, WHO estimates that between 2 and 3 million non-melanoma skin cancers and 132 000 melanoma skin cancers occur globally each year. In South Africa, the Cancer Association of South Africa reports that skin cancer is the most common cancer in the country, with about 20 000 reported cases and 700 deaths every year.

Although it's true that skin cancer can develop on areas of the skin that are not regularly exposed to the sun, skin cancer commonly develops on areas frequently exposed to the sun. You can greatly reduce your chances of developing skin cancer by avoiding exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation and checking your skin regularly for irregularities.

Besides UV exposure, however, the Mayo Clinic lists several other risk factors you should be aware of that could increase your chances of developing skin cancer, many of which are out of your control.

Top factors that could increase your skin cancer risk

- **Fair skin and eyes.** The lighter your complexion, the less melanin your skin has to protect it from damaging UV rays.
- **A personal history or family history of skin cancer.** If you've been diagnosed with skin cancer once already, you're at a higher risk of developing it again. You're also at a higher risk of developing skin cancer if a family member

of yours has been diagnosed with skin cancer.

- **Certain types and a large number of moles.** Check your moles regularly for any abnormalities and changes, especially if you have a history of abnormal or atypical moles.
- **A history of sunburns.** You're at a higher risk if you've frequently experienced bad sunburns, especially earlier in life.
- **Excessive sun exposure.** You're at a high risk if you spend a lot of time in the sun for work or leisure.
- **Sunny and high-altitude climates.** Living at a high altitude where the sun is very strong exposes you to more UV rays, as does living in a sunny climate, both of which increase your risk.

As with many other forms of cancer, early detection and treatment is key. Monitor your skin, for any changes or irregularities, and limit your exposure to harmful UV rays as much as possible.