

Skin and sun protection

Health information after cancer treatment as a child or teenager

The purpose of this factsheet is to tell you about long-term side effects (called 'late effects') that can happen after having cancer treatment. They can happen soon after treatment has finished or later in life. The medical team at the hospital where you received your treatment or are attending follow-up checks will be able to help you with specific information about which late effects are relevant to you.

Protecting your skin from the sun is important. This is because too much exposure to sun and sunburn can raise your risk of getting skin cancer. However, sunshine is also important for your vitamin D levels which are responsible for bone health, energy levels, skin, hair and overall wellbeing. It is therefore important to strike a balance between protecting yourself from the sun and getting enough vitamin D from sunlight. In the UK, our sunshine hours are reduced over the winter months so we recommend that everyone considers taking vitamin D supplements from September to April every year. Your late effects team can discuss this with you.

Who is at risk?

Everyone is at risk of developing skin cancer if their skin is regularly exposed to the sun without sun protection. If you had radiotherapy treatment as a child, you are more at risk of developing skin cancer in this area later in life.

How do we monitor skin health?

There are no specific screening tests for skin cancer so it is important to know your own skin and spot any changes in appearance. You should check your skin regularly, especially in the area where you had radiotherapy. Ask a friend or relative to help for areas of skin you are unable to see.

What do I look out for?

Skin cancer can show up differently on the skin depending on the type. The following are types of skin cancer that can affect childhood cancer survivors:

- **basal cell carcinoma** is the type most commonly reported in survivors. Check for a lump, ulcer, changes to skin or discoloured area of skin that doesn't go away after a few weeks. This also applies to squamous cell carcinoma. For more information, visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/non-melanoma-skin-cancer
- **melanoma** is less common in survivors but still reported. Check for any new moles or existing moles that change in shape or colour, itch or bleed. For more information, visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/melanoma-skin-cancer

Skin cancer can be treated if caught early enough. Seek medical advice promptly from your GP or your follow-up team if you spot anything unusual.



Basal cell carcinoma



Melanoma

Continued →

How can I stay safe in the sun?

The following can help you to protect your skin in the sun:

- use at least **SPF factor 30 UVB sunscreen** and **4-star UVA protection**
- **spend time in the shade** between 11am and 3pm
- **wear a wide-brimmed hat**
- **avoid burning your skin**
- **cover up with suitable clothing**, especially over the area where you had your radiotherapy

Most people do not apply enough sunscreen. As a guide, you should aim to apply around:

- 2 teaspoons of sunscreen if you're just covering your head, arms and neck
- 2 tablespoons if you're covering your entire body while wearing a swimming costume
- reapply suncream throughout the day

If sunscreen is applied too thinly, it won't protect your skin as well.

Avoid using sunbeds as this greatly increases your risk of developing skin cancer.

Where can I find more information?

Cancer Research UK:

www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/sun-uv-and-cancer

British Association of Dermatologists:

www.bad.org.uk/skin-cancer

British Skin Foundation:

www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk/what-is-skin-cancer



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Written by CCLG Late Effects Group, a national network of experts who specialise in looking after young cancer survivors, in conjunction with the CCLG Information Advisory Group, comprising multiprofessional experts in the field of children's cancer. If you have any comments on this factsheet, please contact us. CCLG publications on a variety of topics related to children's cancer are available to order or download free of charge from our website.

Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG) is a leading national charity and expert voice for all childhood cancers.

Each week in the UK and Ireland, more than 30 children are diagnosed with cancer. Our network of dedicated professional members work together in treatment, care and research to help shape a future where all children with cancer survive and live happy, healthy and independent lives.

We fund and support innovative world-class research and collaborate, both nationally and internationally, to drive forward improvements in childhood cancer. Our award-winning information resources help lessen the anxiety, stress and loneliness commonly felt by families, giving support throughout the cancer journey.

Our work is funded by donations. If you would like to help, text 'CCLG' to **70300** to donate **£3**. You may be charged for one text message at your network's standard or charity rate. CCLG (registered charity numbers 1182637 and SC049948) will receive 100% of your donation.