

Dr. Rick Wilcox

Coogee Skin Cancer Clinic

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SKIN CHECKS

If you can catch skin cancer early, there is a good chance it can be treated and cured. Ninety-five per cent of melanomas can be treated if caught early.

Detecting skin cancer

If you check your skin regularly, you will get to know what's normal for you and what may have changed since you last looked. Skin cancers (including melanoma) that are detected and treated early have a better outcome than most other types of cancer. Also, skin cancer that is found early needs less invasive treatment.

What to look for

Look for these things when checking your skin:

- any spot, mole or freckle that has changed in 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
- sore that doesn't heal and/or ulcerates or one that heals and breaks down again
- any skin spot that you are worried about.

How and when to check your skin

As a general rule, the more regularly you check your skin, the greater the chance of detecting a skin cancer before it becomes life threatening.

It's easy to check your skin and should only take 15 minutes. Just follow these steps and or ask your friend or relative to look at the parts you can't see.

- Check your whole body – from head to toe, front back and sides.
- Check your head and neck – don't forget your scalp, ears, face and lips. Check the torso, front back and sides.
- Check your arms and hands, including the nail beds.
- Check your buttocks and legs – don't forget the soles of your feet, and between the toes and the nail beds.

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When to see a doctor

The risk of developing skin cancer increases with age, but skin cancer is also a common cancer in younger people, so get to know your own skin and consult your doctor immediately at the first sign of any change.

Also, some people at high risk will need a regular checkup as advised by their doctor.

Skin cancer statistics

Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. Almost 1 in 2 people who live here their whole lives here will develop some form of skin cancer. There are more than 1600 deaths from skin cancer in Australia every year.

In NSW incidence and mortality rates for skin cancer are also high. Over 3500 new cases of melanoma are diagnosed every year and more than 460 people die. There are also some 147,653 new cases of non-melanoma skin cancers (squamous cell and basal cell carcinoma).

Incidence and mortality are highest in people aged over 50 years. However melanoma also occurs in younger people. In 2005 in NSW, melanoma was the most common cancer in males aged 25-54 and in females aged 15-29. It was the second most common cancer in women 30-54 years of age.