

# Skin cancer

## The selfies you should be taking

Photographing your skin can help a dermatologist identify key conditions.

The most common cancers in Australia do not occur inside the body. "Skin cancers are more common than all other cancers combined," says Dr Elizabeth Dawes-Higgs.

An annual skin check with a dermatologist is recommended, especially for people over 40. But how do you make the most of your visit? Dr Dawes-Higgs says the key is to be prepared.

Dawes-Higgs and Dr Nina Wines run Northern Sydney Dermatology in Northbridge.

Their seven-strong team of doctors offer medical, surgical, laser and aesthetic dermatology and, as with most dermatologists in Australia, treating skin cancers is an increasingly significant part of the practice.

In order to make the most of a skin check appointment, they suggest taking a written list with you.

Check your skin beforehand and make note of any concerns you have. Have new spots appeared? Have existing ones changed? Use a hand mirror to check hard to see places, like the back and feet.

Dr Wines suggests self-screening every three months and taking photos on your phone. "This gives a reference point in between appointments," she says.



Melanoma can occur on the soles of the feet, on hands, under the nails or on the scalp.

Also on that list should be a history of any previous skin cancers you've had. "It gives us an idea about somebody's risk

profile and assists with picking up skin cancers, as well as indicating how frequently they will need to have their skin checked - sooner

rather than later - and how often that person needs to check their own skin, too," says Dr Dawes-Higgs. Also list any medication being taken, as some people can react with the medication used during a skin biopsy.

For the visit, be mentally prepared to take your clothes off, as a skin check involves examining the entire body. Dr Wines says that many patients think you can only get melanoma where sun hits the skin.

"It's not the case," she says. "Melanoma occurs in sun protected areas such as the soles of the feet, hands, under the nails or the scalp". Wear loose clothing that is easy to remove, and preferably a separate top and bottom clothing combination.

Dermatologists also suggest men come to appointments clean-shaven and that women don't wear make-up or nail polish. "There are some skin cancers that can occur on the nail bed," says Dr Dawes-Higgs.

Given the medical training dermatologists undertake, they also diagnose other conditions during a consultation. "We're not just looking for skin cancer when you come in. We sometimes find internal cancers by how things present on the skin. For instance if someone has leukaemia, they may have skin signs that show us that," explains Dr Wines. "Your skin health can tell us a lot about what is going on in the inside".

"When you see a dermatologist you're getting a comprehensive health check," says Dr Dawes-Higgs.

**NSD** Northern Sydney Dermatology

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