



With summer now upon us, *Kent Life* has asked a local expert about the importance of taking care in the sun

Sun sense

Q: Tell us a little bit about skin cancer

Skin cancer is now the commonest cancer in the world. There are essentially two different types: non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC) and melanoma. The latter is less common, but has the highest mortality rate and it can affect younger people. The lifetime risk of developing skin cancer in Australia is one in three, compared to about one in 40 in the UK.

While the incidence of skin cancer in the UK is significantly less than Australia, our death rates are higher and the number of people who have skin cancer in this country is expected to dramatically increase in the next decade.

Raising awareness is vital, as early prevention and diagnosis is the key to successful treatment.

Q: What should we look out for?

Look out for new or existing moles that are darkly pigmented, change in colour and/or size, have an irregular outline and itch, bleed or crust. If you are unsure or concerned that you may have one or more of these symptoms, visit your GP. He or she will examine your skin and would be able to refer you to a specialist plastic surgeon or dermatologist.

Q: How can we reduce the risk of developing skin cancer?

Australia has dramatically decreased rates of skin cancer with the introduction of sun protection programmes, such as the 'slip, slop, slap, now wrap' campaign – sun awareness is vital. Avoid the midday sun (between 11am and 3pm), apply liberal amounts of sunscreen with a Sun

Protection Factor (SPF) of 30+ and wear a hat, loose clothes (tightly woven) and sunglasses. The face and neck are the areas most commonly affected by sun damage, so be sure to apply sunscreen to lips, ears, around eyes, neck and scalp if your hair is thinning.

A history of sun burn when young puts people at an increased risk of developing skin cancer later in life. Fifty per cent of total lifetime sunlight exposure occurs in childhood, so be particularly careful with children; if they are exposed to the sun, dress them in sun-suits or long-sleeves, hats and sunglasses and apply a liberal amount of high SPF sunscreen regularly.

Q: What else should we know about sun protection?

It is possible that the increased use of sun creams may give a false sense of security, which may encourage people to go into the sun more and, as a result, cause an increase in the risk of developing skin cancers. Sunscreens only partially protect your skin; therefore using sun creams does not mean that you can sunbathe for long periods without harm.

Australia leads the way in sun protection with its 'THINK ZINC!' campaign. Zinc oxide provides the best sun protection but, when applied, its appearance is white, which is not very popular. Scientists have recently patented revolutionary technology to make zinc oxide become transparent, which is more acceptable to consumers. Niacinamide serum is another exciting breakthrough and now available to patients in the UK.

Research has shown it has significant anti-skin cancer properties, as well as reducing sun damage. ■



Profile

Paul E Banwell, FRCS, MB BS, BSc, consultant plastic and reconstructive surgeon, is head of the Melanoma and Skin Cancer Unit (MASCUC) at the Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead. He was educated in Tunbridge Wells, before commencing his medical studies at St Mary's Hospital Medical School, London.

Paul has a special interest in skin cancer having held a Senior Fellowship position at the Royal Marsden Hospital, specialising in reconstruction following cancer of the skin and soft tissues, the breast and the head and neck region.

He gained further experience in Australia as a British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons' (BAPRAS) Travelling Fellow in skin cancer, reconstructive microsurgery and cosmetic surgery

If you have any concerns about skin cancer or moles, visit your GP or contact the team at Spire Tunbridge Wells Hospital on 01892 741150 and visit our website: www.kent-life.co.uk