

## Skin Cancer: Australia's National Cancer for Rural Australians.

by Dr Sally Shaw.



Australia has the highest incidence rate of skin cancer in the world.

Most skin cancers, including melanoma, are due to accumulated sun exposure and this exposure would have occurred over a whole life time and our skin never forgets!

Baby boomers were already in their 20's by the time the Slip Slop Slap program aired on TV in 1981 and they'd already had plenty of sunburns, peeling and even blistering burns by then. So it is no surprise that melanoma rates have doubled in the last 20 years and we are seeing 80% of all melanomas on 50+ year old Australians, who grew up not using sunscreen.

Melanoma, when advanced, claims a life every six hours in Australia but if melanoma is detected at an early stage often a simple excision can result in a complete cure.

Farmers have a 60 per cent higher death rate due to melanoma and other malignant skin cancers than the general population. Skin cancer deaths in older farmers (65 years and over) are more than double the rate of other Australians. This is due to poor access to skin cancer diagnosis.

Like melanoma, the less dangerous skin cancers, Basal and Squamous Cell Carcinoma, may become invasive and sometimes fatal if left to progress, but if found early these cancers can be treated with a simple excision or even a topical cream or light therapy.

Many of these skin cancers will develop from sun damage spots that are easily detected and can be treated non-invasively at a regular routine skin check. Sun damage spots (solar keratosis), can be easily treated with creams, freezing or light therapy treatment thus preventing them from progressing into skin cancers that will then require surgical excisions.

A yearly or 6 monthly skin check at your Skin Cancer Clinic or GP will enable your doctor to prevent many skin cancers from developing or to detect a skin cancer at the earliest stage that will require minimal and less costly intervention.

Accredited Skin Cancer Clinics, like Peninsula Skin Cancer Centre, have GP's who have pursued further training and qualifications through the Skin Cancer College of Australasia and are experienced in dermoscopy and skin cancer surgery. Dermoscopy is a technique where the doctor uses a hand held, bright light, magnifying lens that enables them to see into the top layers of the skin to detect sun damage or skin cancer at the earliest stage.

The skin cancer surgical excisions, flaps and grafts can be done under local anaesthetic in the GP's clinic's operating theatre and does not require general anaesthetic or an overnight hospital visit. The skin cancer clinic does not require a referral and charge significantly less than specialist plastic surgeons.

Remember to check your skin every month for any moles that are changing size or colour, and look for any non-healing sores, then get them checked by an accredited skin cancer doctor as soon as possible, even if your next skin check isn't due for another few months!

Dr Sally Shaw



Dr Sally Shaw is an accredited GP at Peninsula Skin Cancer Centre in Frankston and Mornington. She is currently completing her fellowship at the Skin Cancer College of Australasia and holds further qualifications in Dermoscopy and Advanced skin cancer surgery.