

Dermatologist Specialist Dr. Jim Muir discusses skin cancer.

Dr. Jim Muir:

My name's Doctor Jim Muir, I am a specialist dermatologist, I only deal with diseases of the skin. Being in Queensland I spend most of my time dealing with skin cancer. I work in private practice, I work at the Mater Public Hospital in Brisbane.

Malignancy means skin growing out of control. It's reproducing itself in a disorganised way and it's producing more of itself. And with some malignancies they have the ability then to go into your bloodstream or your lymphatic stream to spread to other parts of your body. With melanoma that's what kills you, it's not the malignant melanoma in your skin per se that's dangerous. It's the fact that that melanoma can then grow out of control and spread to your liver or your brain, lungs or your bone and that's what ultimately kills you.

If you want to identify suspicious moles on your skin, the first thing is to be aware of what your skin is like. The earliest sign of malignancy is often just change. That way you can go to the doctor and say, look I'm a bit worried about this one and the reasons I am worried are that—it's changed in some way, its starting to bother me, its starting to itch, ooze or ulcerate and then you can get it sorted out. Remember it's very easy for the doctor to confirm or deny whether something is a skin cancer. They are very readily accessible, it's usually a very easy and simple operation just to remove a mole and look at it under a microscope. It's not like lung cancer, breast cancer or bowel cancer where there is a lot of to do to sort it out.

So you can take an active role in surveilling your skin and helping your doctor to help you. The big thing to remember about sun damage is that is it cumulative over your lifetime. The sun damage you get when you are five, ten and twenty-five contributes to your premature ageing and your increased risk of skin cancer when you are older.

So just in everyday life, especially in an area like Queensland where there is lots of sun around, you will get incidental sun exposure that contributes to your total burden of sun damage and increases your risk of skin cancer. So you should be taking some sun protective measures everyday. You should wack on sun block at the start of the day and will protect you from the 10 or 15 or 20 minute sun exposure that you get, even if you are in an office job going to and from work.

Well I think you've got to live. One of the things that always annoys me with some people is that they've been told they should never go out in the sun. That's just crazy, we live in Queensland we have great things to do outdoors and I think people should live their lives. They should do whatever it is they want to do, and if it involves outdoor exposure they you should just take simple measures that will reduce the amount of sun damage you get when you are outdoors.

If you have a choice between, going outdoors with sun protection or without sun protection— use sun protection. Use your factor thirty sunscreen, put it on half an hour before you go out in the sun because that means it binds onto the skin and will stay there when you get sweaty and wet. Use clothing wherever you can. So if you are going surfing wear a rash top that will save you a lot of money in the long run, because you are only going to have to put sun block on the areas that are exposure. If you are playing cricket wear a long sleeve shirt, wear a broad brimmed hat. If you are going to be out in the sun for a long prolonged period of time repeat your application of sun block every couple of hours, because you will sweat it off and wipe it off on your clothing.

If you want to look old when you are forty-five or older than you would otherwise, then get your sun exposure now. Cause that is what is going to get your wrinkles and that is what is going to cause premature aging.

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Skin Cancer

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