



## Skin Cancer

Kidney transplant recipients have an increased risk of skin cancer. It usually takes 20 – 30 years for a person whose immune system is not suppressed, to develop skin cancer. In transplant patients, however, this can happen in as little as three years following transplantation.

### Why?

- The immunosuppressive drugs that are needed to prevent kidney rejection, reduce the body's ability to destroy abnormal potentially malignant cells which are produced by the damaging effects of ultraviolet light on the skin cells.
- Ultraviolet radiation in sunlight is the main cause of skin cancer.
- 90% of these skin cancers occur on sun exposed areas, i.e. face, neck, arms, hands and lower legs.

### What should you do?

- Reduce cumulative exposure to sunlight and not just the number of sunburns, to decrease the risk of skin cancer. Frequent small doses may be just as bad as big ones.

- If possible, avoid the sun, especially in the middle of the day (10:00am to 4:00pm daylight saving time) and always wear protective clothing, hats and sunglasses.
- Cover up with hats and clothing. 90% of summer clothing is an effective block and better than a SPF30 sunscreen. Choose close weave material as this blocks out the most UV. Ideally, wear long sleeves, trousers and long skirts. Hats should have a broad brim or be safari hats.
- Your eyes and sensitive skin around them, can be damaged if exposed to too much sunlight. While cancer of the eye is rare, basal cell carcinoma of the surrounding skin is relatively common. Good quality sunglasses will provide considerable protection. transplant recipients.
- Sunscreens can help to protect those areas that are left exposed by shielding the skin from the effects of ultraviolet radiation by either absorbing or reflecting the ultraviolet light.

What should you do?

Which sunscreens should I use?

- Always choose a very high protection sunscreen.
- A sun protection factor of SPF30+ is recommended.
- The SPF is a measure of how well the sunscreen protects the skin from ultraviolet radiation. The higher the number the greater the protection.
- Use a broad spectrum sunscreen. Most modern sunscreens are in this category and this means that they protect against both the UVB and UVA and they should comply with the current Australia and New Zealand standards for sunscreens (ASNZS2604: 1998).
- Use a sunscreen stick or lip balm for the lips as there is an increased risk of cancer of the lip in kidney transplant recipients.

A water resistant sunscreen is best as it is less likely to wash off in water or be removed by sweating.

- Apply the sunscreen generously/thickly and evenly over all exposed areas.
- When SPF factors are determined in a laboratory setting, the sunscreen is applied very thickly. Studies have shown that in

practice the SPF factor on the bottle can be divided by three once it is applied to the skin.

- Sunscreen should be applied to the exposed areas 15–30 minutes before going into the sun. It should then be reapplied 15–30 minutes after sun exposure begins.
- Always reapply sunscreen after activity that could remove sunscreen such as swimming, towelling, excessive sweating and rubbing.
- Sometimes regular use of a sunscreen may cause irritation or a dermatitis. This may be because of sensitive skin or sometimes the person may develop an allergy to a component of the cream.
- If you do have sensitive skin, it may be best to choose either a 'chemical-free' sunscreen or a low irritant sunscreen. Some sunscreens are partially funded and can be obtained on prescription. Ask your doctor.

Signs of skin cancer.

If you notice any of the following, see your doctor immediately.

Treatment will be easier if it is begun early.

- Any unusual skin condition that does not heal in four weeks.
- Any new mole or freckle.
- Any mole or freckle that starts to grow, changes its shape, changes colour, bleeds, becomes painful, itchy, or shows redness, darkness or dull brownish zone around the mole. Ideally every transplant patient should have a skin check every 12 months. and always wear protective clothing, hats and sunglasses.