

Dr Adrian Burt



**A change to a mole
isn't the only sign
of skin cancer.**

**BE CLEAR
ON CANCER**



Dr Prue Mitchell

...about **skin cancer**

Skin cancer is very common in England. There are two main types of skin cancer, the more common but less serious “non-melanoma” and “malignant melanoma”. Malignant melanoma is the most serious form and is often just called “melanoma”. Although this leaflet focuses on melanoma, some of the information applies to other types of skin cancer too.

Anyone can develop the disease but you’re more likely to get it if you have any of the following:

- Lots of moles or freckles
- Fair skin that burns easily
- Red or fair hair
- Light-coloured eyes
- A history of sunburn
- A personal or family history of skin cancer

You can develop skin cancer at any age but those aged 50 or over are more likely to get it. Around 2,300 people die from the disease in England each year (around 1,800 from melanoma and around 500 from non-melanoma). That's more than 6 people a day. But this needn't be the case – if the signs are spotted early, it's easier to treat.

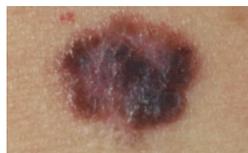
...about how to spot it

The most common sign of skin cancer is a change to a mole, freckle or normal patch of skin. It's important to get to know your skin and what it looks like normally, so that you notice any unusual or persistent changes. Use a mirror or ask your partner or a friend to check the areas of your skin that you can't see.

These pictures show some of the things to look out for in melanoma skin cancer. Please be aware that not all skin cancers look like this. These pictures are just examples and are not to scale.



The two sides don't look the same



Irregular border – edges may be blurred or jagged



Uneven colour, with more than one shade



Large size – usually at least the size of the end of a pencil

Images courtesy of Cancer Research UK

A melanoma can grow anywhere on the body but for women melanomas are most often found on the legs and for men on the back and chest.

Other signs of skin cancer:

It's important to be aware that there are other signs of skin cancer too. These include:

- A new growth or sore that doesn't heal
- A spot, mole or sore that itches or hurts
- A mole or growth that bleeds, crusts or scabs

Don't try to diagnose yourself – if you notice any unusual or persistent changes to your skin it could be a sign of skin cancer, so go and see your doctor. It's probably nothing serious, but if it is skin cancer, finding it early makes it easier to treat.

**...about how important it is to
see your doctor**

Melanoma and some other skin cancers can spread to other parts of the body if they aren't treated. Many people find it hard to understand how something on their skin could be life threatening but cancer cells can break off and enter the bloodstream, spreading to other parts of the body.

It is very important to see your doctor if you notice any unusual or persistent changes to your skin. Your doctor will want to see you and you're not wasting anyone's time by getting checked out. The chances are it's nothing serious, but if it is skin cancer, getting it diagnosed and treated early could save your life.

And if you spot any changes to your partner's skin, or if a friend or relative says they've noticed changes to their skin, tell them they should see their doctor.

You can find your doctor's contact details online at [nhs.uk/findgp](https://www.nhs.uk/findgp)

...about how seeing your doctor early could save your life



I was diagnosed with skin cancer four years ago after noticing a freckle on my cheek. At first I didn't think anything of it, but over time I noticed the freckle starting to darken and change shape, so I went to my doctor. She referred me to a specialist for tests, which showed that I had melanoma, a serious form of skin cancer.

When you are told you have skin cancer, it is such a shock. I have always been aware of the disease but I just presumed, like most people do, that it would never happen to me.

A plastic surgeon removed the freckle shortly after my diagnosis. Further tests showed all the cancer cells had been removed and I've just been left with a scar on my face.

Since my diagnosis I appreciate the things we may take for granted, like family time, and am grateful that I am around to share special moments with my family.

My story is the perfect example of why you should report any unusual changes to your skin to your doctor as soon as possible. Early diagnosis not only means that treatment is less invasive, it could also save your life.

Bill Norton, aged 69
Supporter of Cancer Research UK

...about how to **reduce** your chances of getting skin cancer

Most skin cancers are caused by too much sun. You shouldn't avoid the sun completely, as it is an important source of vitamin D. However, to reduce the risk of skin cancer, avoid sunburn by:

- Spending time in the shade when the sun is at its strongest, usually between 11am and 3pm
- Covering up – wear clothes that protect you from the sun, including a hat and sunglasses
- Using sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 and a high star rating

Take extra care when on holiday in sunnier climates – you may burn quickly, even when it isn't hot.

Sunbeds and sunlamps can increase your risk of developing skin cancer. Public Health England recommend that you don't use them, except for medical reasons.

Unclear on anything?

Visit **[nhs.uk/skincancer](https://www.nhs.uk/skincancer)**