

How and when to check your skin



This Information Sheet provides information on how to check your skin, what to look for and when to see your doctor.

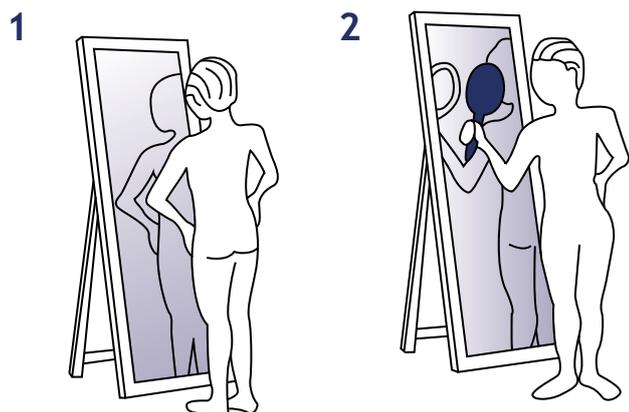
Get to know your skin by checking it regularly—particularly if you are over 50, have a family history of skin cancer or have had any bad sunburns as a child.

It is recommended that all New Zealanders get into the habit of checking their skin (preferably once every three months) so they can spot skin cancer early when there is a better chance of successful treatment.

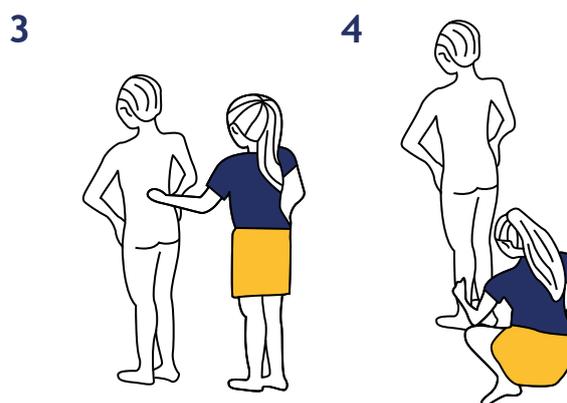
Ask your friend, use a mirror or ask a relative to look at the parts you can't see. (If you can't check your skin, ask your doctor's practice nurse or the doctor.) It's easy to check your skin and should only take 15 minutes. Just follow these steps.

- Check your whole body—from head to toe, front, back and sides
- Check your head and neck—don't forget your scalp, ears, face and lips
- Check the trunk, front, back and sides
- Check your arms and hands, including nails
- Check the soles of your feet, between your toes and nails
- Check your buttocks and legs.

Diagrams 1-2 are examples of a person using a full length mirror and hand-held mirror to check their own skin.



Diagrams 3-4 are examples of two people checking skin.



What to look for

Look for these things when checking your skin:

- any spot, mole or freckle that has changed in shape, size or colour
- a new spot that is different from other spots around it
- any small, dome-shaped lump that wasn't there before
- an outline of a mole that changes or becomes raised
- the surface of a mole that has become rough, scaly or has become an open sore
- a mole that itches or tingles
- a sore that bleeds, doesn't heal and/or has become an open sore
- a sore that heals and has become an open sore again
- any skin spot that you are worried about.

Skin cancers rarely hurt and are more often seen than felt. Develop a regular habit of checking your skin for new spots and changes to existing freckles or moles. Self-examination can find skin cancers in their early stages.

When to see a doctor

Have your skin checked by a doctor immediately if you notice any of the changes described above.

The risk of developing skin cancer increases with age, but skin cancer also affects younger people. Get to know your own skin and talk to your doctor at the first sign of any change.

Are you in a higher risk group?

Those at higher-risk of skin cancer include:

- a personal or family history of melanoma
- a large number of moles
- unusual looking moles
- fair skin and a history of sunburn
- classical atypical mole syndrome (CAMS)
- a history of organ transplant or a suppressed immune system (a reduction in a person's ability to fight disease) or
- if you are taking photo sensitizing medication.
- any combination of these risk factors.

Some people at higher risk of skin cancer will need a regular skin check as advised by their doctor.

Further information and resources

- Cancer Society Information Sheet: *"Where can I get my skin checked?"*
- Cancer Society leaflet: *"Take Time to Spot the Difference"*. This is available from your local Cancer Society and our website: <http://www.cancernz.org.nz/reducing-your-cancer-risk/sunsmart/sunsmart-resources/>
- Cancer Information Helpline: **0800 CANCER (0800 226 237)**.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to the Cancer Council Queensland for allowing the Society to reproduce their diagrams.