



INFORMATION AND ADVICE ON SKIN CANCER FOR PATIENTS AWAITING AN ORGAN TRANSPLANT

What are the aims of this leaflet?

This leaflet has been written to help you reduce the risk of developing skin cancer in the future after receiving an organ transplant.

If you are going to have, or have had an organ transplant, it is important that you take good care of your skin. This is because people having transplants are more at risk of developing skin cancer.

Why will I be more at risk from skin cancer?

People who have had a transplant are given immunosuppressive drugs to prevent them rejecting their transplanted organ. These drugs also increase the risk of skin cancer.

How likely will I be to get skin cancer?

All transplant patients are at risk of developing skin cancer and the risk increases over the years. For instance, twenty years after transplantation, more than half of all transplant patients will have had a skin cancer. Whilst all transplant patients are at risk, some are more likely than others to develop skin cancer. Patients with any of the following are at a higher risk than others:

- Fair skin that burns easily
- Light coloured eyes: blue, grey or hazel
- Blonde or red hair
- Lots of freckles
- Outdoor work or heavy sun exposure in the past
- History of skin cancer

On the other hand if you are of African, Arab, Asian, or Oriental descent you are much less likely to develop skin cancer than white-skinned transplant patients.

How can I reduce the risk of getting skin cancer?

Exposure to the sun is the main cause of skin cancer in organ transplant patients. This does not just mean sunbathing. You expose yourself to the sun each time you do any outdoor activities including: gardening, walking, sports, or a long drive in the car (even with the windows closed).

You can take some simple precautions to help prevent a skin cancer appearing:

- Cover up. Wear a sun hat, long sleeves and trousers in sunny weather.
- Stay in the shade, particularly between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.
- When outdoors use a sun block of Sun Protection Factor (SPF) 30 or above and star rating *** or **** that protects against UVB and UVA and apply it every 2-3 hours.
- Remember that winter sun, such as on a skiing holiday, can contain just as much of the damaging ultra-violet light as summer sun.
- Don't use sunbeds.

When should I see my doctor?

You should report to your doctor or nurse if you develop any marks on your skin that are:

- Growing
- Bleeding or scabbing
- Changing in appearance in any way.
- Not healing completely
- Any new skin lumps or bumps

Dermatologists now work closely with organ transplant teams and you may be referred on.

Other information sources:

www.sunsmart.org.uk/index.htm

www.cancerhelp.org.uk/type/skin-cancer/about/preventing-skin-cancer

This leaflet aims to provide accurate information about the subject and is a consensus of the views held by representatives of the British Association of Dermatologists: its contents, however, may occasionally differ from the advice given to you by your doctor.

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