

Where can I get my skin checked?



This has been written to provide you with information about where you can get your skin checked. It also provides questions you may wish to ask before and after your check.

The Cancer Society of New Zealand does not operate or endorse any particular skin clinic. If you have an unusual looking spot, freckle or mole, or just want to get your skin checked, there are a number of doctors or clinics you can visit.

General practitioners

A general practitioner (GP) can perform a skin check. This can be combined with a general health check. GPs can also treat some skin cancers and provide other care.

If you have an unusual looking spot, freckle or mole, or would like to have your skin checked, the Cancer Society recommends you make an appointment with your GP.

Your GP knows your full health history and can:

- talk with you about skin cancer risk
- examine your skin
- advise you about checking your own skin
- check the skin on your whole body, as well as any unusual looking spots.

They may examine your skin themselves or refer you to a specialist.

Specialists

If you would like a second opinion, ask your GP to refer you to a specialist, such as a dermatologist (a doctor who specialises in diagnosing and treating skin disease, including skin cancer), a plastic surgeon or a general surgeon.

If you would like a consultation with a specialist, keep the following in mind:

- You can have a referral from a GP (or you can contact a dermatologist directly).
- Before the appointment, ask about the fees. (Specialists, generally, charge at a higher rate than GPs.)
- There may be a long waiting list. If you have a spot of particular concern, your referring doctor should organise an urgent appointment.
- If you live in a rural area, there may not be a dermatologist based in your local community. However, many areas have visiting dermatologists. Your GP should be able to advise you about them.

Skin clinics

Some skin clinics operate in New Zealand and offer a variety of services and fee arrangements.

If you decide to make an appointment at a skin clinic you may like to ask the following questions:

- What qualifications and experience does the person examining me have?
- Do they have any specialist training in skin examination?
- Are they a member or fellow of any professional association that specialises in skin cancer (such as the New Zealand Dermatological Society)?
- What costs are involved—for the first consultation, and for any follow-up treatment I may need?
- Do they charge for storing any images that are taken?
- Will a record of my examination, diagnosis and treatment be sent to my GP?

Note: Computer-assisted scanning and images help the person examining your skin to make a diagnosis. The quality of that diagnosis depends on the experience and skill of that person.

After your skin check

Once you have had your skin checked, the doctor or clinic should also provide you with information about skin cancer prevention and any follow-up you may need.

You can ask for:

- Results of any test you have had
- Information about skin cancer (also available from the Cancer Society website <http://www.cancernz.org.nz/reducing-your-cancer-risk/sunsmart/>)
- Information about sun protection and skin cancer prevention (also available from the Cancer Society website)
- Information about checking your own skin (also available from the Cancer Society)
- A reminder letter about future skin checks.

What if I'm diagnosed with skin cancer?

If you are told you have skin cancer, here are some questions you may wish to ask your doctor:

- What type of skin cancer do I have?
- Do I need treatment immediately?
- What are the treatment options available?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each treatment?
- Will the doctor treat me or will I be referred to a dermatologist or another specialist (if I have not already seen one)?
- If I go to a specialist will my GP get my results?

Many skin cancers are treated at the doctor's surgery and do not need specialist treatment. You are always entitled to a second opinion or referral to a specialist for treatment.

Further information and resources

- General sun protection and skin cancer prevention and early detection Information Sheets on the Cancer Society website: <http://www.cancernz.org.nz/reducing-your-cancer-risk/sunsmart/sunsmart-information-sheets/>
- Cancer Society Information Sheet: *"How and when to check your own skin"* is available from your local Cancer Society and our website: <http://www.cancernz.org.nz/reducing-your-cancer-risk/sunsmart/sunsmart-resources/>
- Cancer Society leaflet: *"Take Time to Spot the Difference"* is available from your local the Cancer Society and our website: <http://www.cancernz.org.nz/reducing-your-cancer-risk/sunsmart/sunsmart-resources/>
- *Melanoma/Tonapuku: A guide for people with Melanoma* is available from your local Cancer Society or from our website: <http://www.cancernz.org.nz/assets/files/info/Melanoma.pdf>
- Cancer Information Helpline—**0800 CANCER (0800 226 237)**.
- New Zealand Guidelines Group www.nzgg.org.nz