

FACE PAINTING, SUNSHINE AND SUMMERWEAR

Face painting is becoming increasingly popular at fairs and children's parties. The colourful superficial mask can bring joy and happiness to the child, and those around them, without permanently changing any of their facial features. It is a technique often seen most strikingly in its use by clowns to depict their personality and individuality.



The face is the most visualised part of our bodies for social interaction. Expressions, even without words, can give away how we are feeling. As a consequence, our facial skin is more exposed to external factors than elsewhere, including sunshine. Bombardment by UV rays accelerates the signs of aging – the skin looking thinner, paler, and more translucent, with the development of pigmented spots and the appearance of wrinkles!

However, more sinister changes may also occur. Skin cancer is the commonest form of cancer, usually occurring on exposed parts of our bodies, with the face being particularly prone.

There are a number of different types of skin cancer:

1. *Squamous cell carcinoma* is the commonest - usually arises either as a firm, reddish, wart-like lump that grows gradually or a flat spot that becomes a bleeding sore that won't heal.
2. *Basal cell Carcinoma*, not uncommon on the face - arising as a spot or pearly, slightly reddened ovoid lesion indented in the centre – which may develop into a non-healing bleeding ulcer.
3. *Melanoma* is the most dangerous type of skin cancer - which may appear as a change in an existing mole. Suspect a melanoma, rather than a mole, by remembering the **ABCDE's** of melanoma: **A**symmetry, irregular **B**orders, change in **C**olour, **D**iameter larger than rubber on a pencil, **E**volution of a mole's characteristics, be it size, shape, colour, elevation, bleeding, itching, or crusting.

If you become concerned about any skin lesion arrange to see your Doctor within 4 weeks.



You can reduce your chances of developing skin cancer by protecting your skin from UV rays – wear a hat with a brim, stay in the shade when you can (particularly when your shadow is shorter than your height) and apply sunscreen as a barrier, one with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 and preferably water resistant. It should be applied every two hours, or more frequently if you are swimming or sweating.

Sunscreen may not be as noticeable, but colourful hats and summery clothing can often send out the same message as the face paint on a child.



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