

## Behavioral Counseling to Prevent Skin Cancer

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) has issued a **final** recommendation statement on *Behavioral Counseling to Prevent Skin Cancer*.

The recommendation in this statement is for children, teens, and young adults ages 10 to 24 who have fair skin. The recommendation does not apply to children younger than age 10. It also does not apply to people with signs and symptoms of skin cancer, those who have had skin cancer before, or those who are being treated for skin cancer. The statement also discusses adults older than age 24.

The Task Force reviewed recent research studies on actions health care professionals can take to help people prevent skin cancer. This included talking with patients and giving them information needed to make healthy decisions. This type of care is called behavioral counseling. The recommendation summarizes what the Task Force learned about the potential benefits and harms of this counseling. This fact sheet explains the recommendation and what it might mean for you.

What is skin cancer?

Skin cancer is cancer that occurs in different kinds of cells in the epidermis, the outer layer of the skin. The three main types of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma.

### Facts About Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. Every year, more than 2 million Americans learn they have skin cancer. The two most common types—basal cell and squamous cell—can usually be cured when they are found and treated early. These types of skin cancer are also called nonmelanoma skin cancer. The third main kind of skin cancer is melanoma. It is much less common, but more serious and more deadly.

Too much exposure to UV rays damages skin cells, which can lead to skin cancer. UV rays come from the sun, tanning booths, and sunlamps.

Anyone at any age can get skin cancer, but the people at greatest risk are those who are exposed to UV rays during childhood and the teen years and those with:

- **Blonde or red hair and light eye color**
- **Fair skin that freckles and sunburns easily**
- **Skin that does not easily tan**

## Behavioral Counseling to Prevent Skin Cancer

During office visits, if you are ages 10 to 24 and have fair skin, your health care professional may talk with you about the dangers of UV rays and how to prevent skin cancer. He or she may give you a booklet or show you pictures or a video about the damage UV rays can do to your skin.

Your health care professional may encourage you to take simple actions to protect yourself from UV rays:

- Use “broad spectrum” sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or greater. This type of sunscreen protects against both UVA and UVB rays.
- Cover up with a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, long-sleeves, and long pants or skirts.
- Stay out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., when the sun’s UV rays are the strongest.
- Avoid tanning booths and sunlamps.

In addition to protecting yourself against skin cancer, doing these things will help keep your skin looking young and healthy.

### Potential Benefits and Harms of Behavioral Counseling

The main potential benefit of counseling is reduced risk of skin damage and skin cancer because of actions taken to limit exposure to UV rays. The Task Force found that counseling did result in healthier behaviors in children, teens, and young adults.

The Task Force found few studies about counseling adults older than age 24. Therefore, the Task Force could not determine whether counseling changed behaviors enough in adults to reduce their risk of skin cancer.

Few studies have looked at counseling parents and guardians of children younger than age 10. As a result, the Task Force did not include young children in this recommendation. However, it is still important to protect young children from the damaging effects of the sun.

The Task Force found no evidence that counseling to prevent skin cancer has any potential harms.

## The Task Force Recommendations on Behavioral Counseling to Prevent Skin Cancer: What Do They Mean?

Here are the Task Force’s recommendations on counseling to prevent skin cancer. The recommendations have letter grades. The grades are based on the quality of the evidence about the counseling and on the potential benefits and harms of the counseling. The grades are explained in the box at the end of this fact sheet.

When the Task Force recommends counseling, it is because the counseling has more potential benefits than potential harms. When there is not enough evidence to judge potential benefits and harms, the Task Force does not make a recommendation for or against counseling—it issues an I Statement. The Notes explain key ideas.

Visit the Task Force Web site to read the [full recommendation statement](#). The statement explains the evidence the Task Force reviewed and how it decided on the grades. An [evidence report](#) provides more detail about the studies the Task Force reviewed.

- 1 The Task Force recommends *counseling* children, adolescents, and young adults aged *10 to 24 years* who have fair skin about minimizing their exposure to ultraviolet radiation to *reduce risk for skin cancer*. **Grade B**
  
- 2 The Task Force concludes that the current *evidence is insufficient* to assess the balance of benefits and harms of counseling adults older than 24 years about minimizing risks to prevent skin cancer. **I Statement**

**Notes**

- 1 *counseling*  
Talking with patients during an office visit; can include showing a video or photos, or providing written information.
  
- 10 to 24 years*  
Most studies focus on this age group, which is also most likely to spend time in the sun or to use tanning booths to get a tan.
  
- reduce risk for...*  
Counseling during an office visit helps young people do more to protect themselves from the sun and UV rays.
  
- evidence is insufficient*
- 2 *insufficient*  
The Task Force did not find enough information on skin cancer counseling in this population to determine potential benefits and harms.

**What is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force?**

The Task Force is an independent group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, or preventive medicines. The recommendations apply to people with no signs or symptoms of the disease being discussed.

To develop a recommendation statement, Task Force members consider the best available science and research on a topic. The Task Force posts draft documents for public comment, including a draft recommendation statement. All comments are reviewed and considered in developing the **final recommendation statement**. To learn more, visit the **Task Force Web site**.

USPSTF Recommendation Grades	
Grade	Definition
A	Recommended.
B	Recommended.
C	Recommendation depends on the patient's situation.
D	Not recommended.
I statement	There is not enough evidence to make a recommendation.

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(healthfinder.gov)
  
-  **Anyone Can Get Skin Cancer**  
(National Cancer Institute)
  
-  **Skin Cancer**  
(National Cancer Institute)
  
-  **Skin Cancer**  
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