

Skin cancer concerns after the pandemic

Several thousand Norwegians are affected by skin cancer, every year. After a winter with a lot of home and indoor time, we are ready for the sun and summer. When we also know that many people have postponed seeking health care during the pandemic, skin cancer is an even greater concern than usual.

"We see that more patients come to us later in the course of the disease than we saw before. It's worrying. Because the earlier skin cancer is detected, the better the prognosis. And we can do a lot ourselves. We need to get better at checking our skin so that we can detect skin changes as early as possible. We Norwegians need to become much more aware here, says [Xiaotong Li](#), who specializes in skin diseases.

Skin cancer is widespread in Norway

Skin cancer is mainly due to sun damage. Mole cancer is the most serious form of skin cancer, and not to joke about. We need to raise awareness of good sun habits and not least about what warning signs we need to take seriously if we notice changes in the skin.

- Norway is at the top of the world in the number of skin cancer cases per capita. Despite the fact that we live far to the north. Maybe that's exactly why we're exposed. We have light skin, and many of us do not take into account the necessary considerations when we can first enjoy the long-awaited sun. In my experience, the younger generations may have better solar habits than their parent generations, says Li.

Ever-improving habits in the sun

One of those who have experienced the problem is Finn Reinertsen (61) from Nordstrand. He is not a typical sunbather, but has an active lifestyle, and often spends his free time on the golf course, in the field, skiing in the mountains or on foot on the plateau.

"The awareness of protecting yourself from the sun was less when I and my generation were young. We were going to get brown and spend a lot of time outdoors. The concern about getting sunburned was not an obstacle. I think that applies to many of us who had our "heyday" in the 70s and 80s. My impression is that there is a greater awareness of good sun habits today. But not big enough.

We do not "sunbathe" – but are active

A few years ago, Reinertsen was diagnosed with basal cell cancer, after detecting a skin change on his nose.

- I live an active life with a lot of outdoor activity all year round. I've given too little thought to the fact that it means a lot of sun exposure. The same goes for many others in my circle. They got a wake-up call after I was diagnosed with this type of cancer," says Reinertsen.

Reinertsen's partner encouraged him to contact a doctor. After treatment, he now has good prognosis for recovery. A minor procedure was performed, to remove the cancer cells on the nose.

"I've barely been in hospital all my life, so of course I was a bit worried, but it was quick and nice and the treatment seems to be successful," he says.

Since then, he has become more aware of protecting himself from the sun, but also looking for skin changes in himself and his loved ones. When he is at the GP, checks on skin and moles are also included as part of the examination.

Men need a push

Every year, at the beginning of summer, Volvat has its own "Skin Cancer Day". Dermatologists set aside a full day for examinations of skin changes and moles, and patients only pay the deductible. This year, this day was marked at the end of May, and the response was overwhelming.

- Our network broke down when we opened the appointments for Skin Cancer Day. We had full timesheets throughout the day, where we both examine and inform the patient. Throughout the day we found several patients with skin changes, which we must follow up further, and also some patients with skin cancer," concludes Li.

Li points out men as one target group that is particularly important to reach.

Reinertsen's story is not untypical. Men seem to refuse more than women to go to the doctor when they notice skin changes or suspicious moles. Often, many of my male patients say that my wife or partner encouraged them to contact a doctor, or also booked the appointment for them.

Skin cancer affects women and men equally, so it is important that men also take the risks seriously.

Protect yourself from the sun and check your skin!

Norwegians may be more exposed to the sun than we think, even though our solar habits have improved. It's related to us being active. That's why many of us think we're not sunbathing.

-My impression is that fewer and fewer of us lie on a sun lounger and sunbathe when we are on holiday. But whether we use our legs, cycle, walk around the golf course or play football, we are as exposed to the sun as when we sunbathe. Good protection from the sun is crucial," concludes Xiatong Li.

"Protect yourself from the sun and check your skin" are important messages from dermatologists. Many of us have had too high a threshold for seeking health care during the pandemic. And now summer is at the door, with sun and outdoor activities. So this year, this message is more important than ever.

Xiatong Li's five tips for good sun habits:

With good sun habits, we can take care of our skin and reduce the risk of skin cancer:

1. Enjoy the sun, but in moderation. Wear sunglasses.
2. Remember to protect your skin from the sun. Use sunscreen, preferably factor 30. Clothes also protect well.
3. Take breaks and retreat from the sun when it is at its strongest.
4. Do not use tanning beds, it increases the likelihood of developing skin cancer.
5. Avoid getting sunburned. If you get sunburned, it means your skin is sun damaged. Repeated sunburns are unfavorable in terms of skin cancer in the future.

Xiatong Li's five skin check advice:

Make a habit of checking your skin, and others in the family, preferably once a month. Look for:

1. Wounds in the skin that do not heal. Wounds in the skin that bleed easily.
2. Reddish skin thickening with discomfort or itching.
3. Discoloured nodules in the skin that grow.
4. Eczema-like rash with crusts falling off and re-forming.
5. Moles that change or grow. Moles that form wounds that do not heal or that bleed.

These are five warning signs that *may be signs of cancer* but can also be harmless. The Cancer Society's advice is that if symptoms last more than three weeks, contact your doctor.

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About Volvat Medical Centre AS

Volvat Medical Centre AS was established in 1985 and is Norway's first privately owned hospital. Today, the Volvat Group is one of the country's leading private health companies for patients across the country.

Volvat has 20 centres located in Oslo, Fredrikstad, Moss, Hamar, Lillehammer, Bergen, Trondheim and Tromsø. The centres have a wide range of medical services ranging from



health-promoting and preventive work to treatment and rehabilitation. Volvat has hospital approval in Oslo, Fredrikstad, Bergen, Trondheim and Tromsø.

Volvat is owned by Ramsay Health, which also operates large hospitals and medical centres in Sweden, Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Australia.

Volvat's quality strategy is based on the group's vision "Always to help", which forms the foundation of the company, rooted in modern medicine and modern management. Volvat is uncompromising when it comes to patient safety, quality of delivery and continuous improvement of all services. Therefore, all clinical departments are ISO-certified according to the quality standard 9001: 2015 and the environmental standard 14001: 2015.

Per Helge Fagermoen is Volvat's Chief Executive Officer.