



May is Skin Cancer Awareness Month

Most people like to get a little sun. Its warmth and light can relax us and boost our spirits. But the benefits come with a dangerous tradeoff. Each year more than 3.5 million cases of skin cancer are diagnosed in the US, over 90 percent of which are caused by the sun's ultraviolet rays (UVR), which include UVA and UVB rays. Similarly, most of the skin damage we associate with aging — wrinkles, sagging, leathery, and discoloration — is UVR-related. And this damage is cumulative.

The summer is not the only time you are at risk for damage from the sun. Know how to protect yourself no matter what the season. You are probably in the habit of packing sunscreen for a day at the beach or pool, but you do not have to be actively sunbathing to get a damaging dose of the sun since the sun is shining everyday. Practice these sun-protection basics all year round to give your skin the best chance of long-term health:

Use a sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher whenever you spend time outdoors.



- This applies to all outdoor activities, whether sunny or cloudy: athletics, shopping, picnicking, walking or jogging, gardening, even waiting for a bus.
- Choose a sunscreen with ingredients that block both UVB and UVA rays. Look for products that offer “broad spectrum” or “UVA/ UVB” protection, and make sure your sunscreen has one or more of these UVA-filtering ingredients: titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, stabilized avobenzone, or ecamsule (a.k.a. Mexoryl™)
- Apply liberally and evenly to all exposed skin **30 minutes before going outside**. The average adult in a bathing suit should use approximately one ounce of sunscreen per application. Not using enough will effectively reduce the product's SPF and the protection you get.
- Be sure to cover often-missed spots: lips, ears, around eyes, neck, hands, feet and scalp (if hair is thinning and on your part).
- Reapply at least every 2 hours, more often if some of the product may have been removed while swimming, sweating, or towel-drying.
- **Do not burn.** Even a single sunburn increases your risk of developing melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer; suffering five or more sunburns doubles your lifetime risk.
- Choose a product that suits your skin and your activity. **Sunscreens** are available in lotion, gel, spray, cream, and stick forms. Some are labeled as water resistant, sweatproof, especially for sports, fragrance-free, hypoallergenic, or especially for sensitive skin or children.

Cover up.

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants. Tightly woven fabrics and dark colors, such as deep blue and black, or bright colors, such as orange and red, offer more protection. If you can see light through a fabric, UV rays can get through too. Water makes fabrics more translucent, so do not rely on wearing a T-shirt when swimming to provide sun protection.
- A broad-brimmed hat goes a long way toward preventing skin cancer in often-exposed areas like the neck, ears, scalp, and face. Opt for a 3 – 4 inch brim that extends all around the hat. Baseball caps and visors shade the face but leave neck, lower face, and ears exposed.



- UV-blocking sunglasses with wraparound or large frames protect your eyelids and the sensitive skin around your eyes, common sites for skin cancer and sun-induced aging. Sunglasses also help reduce the risk of cataracts later in life.

Seek the shade, especially between 10 AM and 4 PM.



- That is when the sun's rays are usually strongest. If you're outside, head under a pavilion roof or leafy tree — or carry a sun umbrella. But be aware that sunlight bouncing off reflective surfaces like water can reach you even beneath an umbrella or tree.
- Try taking advantage of early morning and late afternoon to indulge in your favorite outdoor activities — try the beach at sunset, for example, rather than midday.

Never seek a tan.

- There is no such thing as a healthy tan, whether you acquire it on the beach or in a salon. Although tanning salon operators may say that their new bulbs are safe and that some UV exposure is necessary for vitamin D, neither statement is true. A tan is the skin's attempt to prevent further damage by creating a wall of darker pigment.
- The UV radiation emitted by indoor tanning lamps is many times more intense than natural sunlight. Dangers include burns, premature aging of the skin, and the increased risk of skin cancer.



Protect your children and teach them sun safety at an early age.



- Healthy habits are best learned early. Because skin damage occurs with each unprotected exposure and accumulates over the course of a lifetime, make teaching children about sun safety a priority. When they go outside to play, make sure they are well protected with clothing, hats, sunscreen, and sunglasses.
- Keep young infants out of direct sunlight to prevent sunburn. An infant's skin possesses little melanin, the pigment that gives color to skin, hair and eyes and provides some sun protection. Therefore, babies are especially susceptible to the sun's damaging effects.



Visit your doctor.

- See your physician every year for a professional skin cancer exam. And ask your child's pediatrician to examine his or her skin thoroughly as part of a yearly check-up. This is especially important for children and teens at high risk for sun damage, such as those with fair skin, light eyes and hair, and those with a personal or family history of skin cancer.
- Regular total-body checkups are the best way to make sure your skin is healthy and stays that way.

Remember to use sunscreen every day, year-round, in every kind of weather. Follow these tips and you can enjoy yourself safely outdoors, minimizing the sun's dangers while maximizing your health.

Sources:

www.skincancer.org

www.skincancerawarenessproject.com