

KEEPING YOUR SKIN SAFE

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As summer comes to a close many people will forget about the risks associated with the sun. Almost all of the more than 1 million cases of non-melanoma skin cancers diagnosed each year in the U.S. are sun-related. Melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer, will account for about 54,200 cases of skin cancer and most (about 7,600) of the 9,800 deaths due to skin cancer each year. For basal cell or squamous cell cancers, a cure is highly likely if detected and treated early. For localized melanoma, the 5-year survival rate is 96%. But the rates decline to 60% and all the way down to 14% for regional and distant stage melanoma, which is why it is imperative for you examine your skin on a monthly basis to detect skin cancer at an early stage.

What are the factors that increase my risk of developing skin cancer?

- Unprotected and/or excessive exposure to UV radiation - Fair complexion**
- Occupational exposure to coal tar, pitch, creosote, arsenic compounds or radium**
- Family history - Multiple or atypical moles - Severe sunburns as a child**

How do I do a monthly skin exam?

- Get familiar with your skin and its pattern of moles, freckles, blemishes and birthmarks.**
- Be alert for any changes in the number, size, shape or color of spots on your skin.**
- The best time to do your exam is after you bath or shower. Use a full-length and/or hand-held mirror to check your skin from your head to the bottom of your feet.**
- If you do the exam monthly you will know what is normal for you and gain confidence.**

What are the signs of skin cancer that I should report to my health care professional?

- New skin lesions or changes in skin lesions.**
- A change in sensation such as itchiness, tenderness or pain**
- The most common skin cancers, basal and squamous cell, often take the form of a pale, wax-like, pearly nodule/bump, a red scaly, sharply outlined patch or a sore that doesn't heal. Another form of skin cancer, melanoma, often starts as a small, mole-like growth.**
- Almost everyone has moles and the vast majority of moles are perfectly harmless. However, a change in a moles appearance could be a sign of melanoma or another form of skin cancer. Here is a simple ABCD rule to help you remember the important signs to be on the lookout for, although not all melanomas fit the ABCD rule:**
 - A- Asymmetry: ½ of the mole or birthmark doesn't match the other.**
 - B- Border: edges are irregular, ragged, notched or blurred. Spread of pigmentation beyond its border such a dark coloring that spreads past the edge of a mole or mark. Redness or a new swelling beyond the border.**
 - C- Color: color that is not the same all over, but may have differing shades of brown or black, sometimes with patches of red, white or blue.**
 - D- Diameter: areas larger than 6 millimeters (about 1/4 inch or the size of a pencil eraser) or a mole that is growing larger.**

How can I decrease my risk for developing skin cancer?

- Avoid direct sunlight between 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., seek shade and remember that if your shadow is shorter than you, the sun's rays are at their strongest.**

- Cover up with dark clothing made of tightly woven fabrics that cannot be seen through when held up to light. UV rays penetrate a white cotton t-shirt, especially when it is wet.**
- Cover your head with a wide-brimmed hat to shade your face, ears and neck. If you opt for a ballcap remember to protect your ears and neck with sunscreen.**
- Apply a palmful of an SPF 15 or higher sunscreen 1 hour before going outdoors or when driving, during the hours of 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., as UV rays pass through car windows. The SPF you need depends upon how easily you burn. SPF helps determine the length of time you should be outdoors. For example if you use an SPF 15 and you usually begin to burn in 15 minutes, then with an SPF 15 you could be in the sun for 225, with this product, or at least this is a good rule of thumb. This doesn't mean you can put on sunscreen every 225 minutes and be good to go for another 225 minutes. Even if you have not been out in the sun for 225 minutes and feel you are starting to burn, it is time to seek shade.**
- Read the sunscreen label before purchasing it and choose a sunscreen that is a broad spectrum product that blocks UVB and UVA light. Even though a product is water/sweat proof you need to reapply sunscreen at least every 2 hours and after drying off, the product may only last 40 minutes when swimming/sweating. If you are prone to allergies from lotion, you may want to apply a small amount to a test area, before applying.**
- Protect your children with sunscreen. Children are in the sun for many hours a day and the last thing on their mind is sunscreen and proper sun safety. For babies up to 6 months, shade, sun-protective clothing and hats are the best. As a last resort very small amounts of sunscreen may be used on small areas, such as the face and back of the hands.**
- Getting a base tan at an indoor tanning salon gives you very little protection against sunburn. An indoor tan gives you the protection of an SPF 4. A base tan may give you a false sense of security. Any form of tanning injures the skin. You don't see the UV damage to deeper layers of the skin, where it accumulates from every tan and burn you've ever had. There is no such thing as a "safe tan."**
- Water and sand increase the risk of a sunburn. You should be extra cautious when in a boat, fishing on the bank of a pond, picnicing at the local beach or sitting by the pool.**
- Being in a tropical or a semi-tropical climate also increases the risk for a sunburn. This is why you should be more careful when you are on vacation at areas such as Florida. Just because you can tolerate an hour in the sun in Indiana, doesn't mean you will be able to tolerate an hour in the sun at Florida.**
- Wear sunglasses with 99-100% UV absorption when outside or driving during the hours of 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., as skin is not the only part of you that can be damaged by the sun.**
- You should also get a lip balm that has sunscreen, as the lips are prone to burns.**
- Check with your pharmacist or physician if you are taking medications and are not sure if it is a medication that intensifies the effect the sun may have on you.**
- You do not have to be sunbathing to get a sunburn. You should follow these tips when you are outdoors for other reasons. Some examples are watching the races, riding motorcycles or just sitting outside enjoying a nice day of football.**
- Follow these practices even on cloudy or overcast days, as UV rays travel through clouds.**

Information for this article was obtained from the American Cancer Society at www.acs.com.