

Skin Care: Those Who Care About Their Skin Protect It

More and more folks are using sun protection while they work and play outdoors. They know that skin cancer is a threat, but it's a threat they can do something about. If you protect your skin from the sun, your chance of getting skin cancer will be lower.

Why is the sun bad for my skin?

Sunburns and suntans are signs that your skin has been damaged. This damage increases your risk of getting skin cancer. If you protect your skin from the sun, you can lower this risk.

What should I do to protect my skin from the sun?

Follow these "safe-sun" guidelines whenever you are in the sun:

- Stay out of the sun, if you can, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the sun is strongest.
- Wear a long-sleeved shirt and long pants to protect the skin on your body. Wear shirts made from tightly woven cloth, like long-sleeved cotton t-shirts. If the clothing fits loosely, it will be cooler. Special sun-protective clothes are available from several companies, like Solumbra Sun Precautions (telephone: 800-882-7860). Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from the sun. Sun exposure increases your risk of getting cataracts.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat. Wide-brimmed hats help protect your face, neck and ears from the sun. The best hat to wear in the sun has a brim that's at least 6 inches all around. Baseball caps and similar hats don't protect your ears and neck.
- Use sunscreen. Every day, put on a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15, even on cloudy days. Clouds don't protect you from sun damage. Only sunscreen can do that. Use lots of sunscreen and rub it in well. Put the sunscreen on 30 minutes before you go outside. Put the sunscreen everywhere the sun's rays might touch you, including your forehead and face, your ears, the back of your neck and any bald parts on the top of your head. Some sunscreen products say they won't drip into your eyes. You can try those products on your face if that's a problem for you.

What else can I do to protect my skin?

Some doctors think it's a good idea to do a monthly skin check. Ask your doctor about this. If your doctor thinks it's a good idea for you, pick a certain day each month, like the date of your birthday or the day you pay bills, to check your skin. A monthly skin check can help you find skin cancer early. The earlier skin cancer is found, the better the chance for a cure.

The "ABCDE" rule can help you look for signs of skin cancer. When looking at moles on your skin, look for the following:

'ABCDE' Rule

Asymmetry: When both sides of a mole don't look the same.

Border: The edges of a mole are blurry or jagged.

Color: The color of a mole changes--if it's darker than before, the color spreads or goes away, or more than one color appears (blue, red, white, pink, purple or gray).

Diameter: When a mole is larger than a quarter of an inch in diameter (about the size of a pencil eraser).

Elevation: When a mole is raised above the skin and has a rough surface.

You should also watch for these changes of your skin:

- A mole that bleeds
- A mole that grows fast
- A scaly or crusted growth on the skin
- A sore that won't heal
- A mole that itches
- A place on your skin that feels rough like sandpaper

Be sure to check your whole body once each month, including your back, your scalp and the bottom of your feet. Use a hand mirror to check the places that you can't see easily. Have someone help you check the top of your head. You can use a blowdryer on low speed to move your hair so you can see your scalp more easily.

(Created 9/00)
(Updated 10/00)

Skin Cancer: Reduce Your Risk With 'Safe-Sun' Guidelines

What are the safe-sun guidelines?

Safe-sun guidelines are 4 ways to protect your skin and reduce your risk of skin cancer.

1. **Avoid the sun.**

Sunlight damages your skin. The sun is strongest at the middle of the day, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. During these hours, the sun can do the most damage to your skin. Sunburns and suntans are signs that your skin has been damaged. The more damage the sun does to your skin, the more likely you will get early wrinkles, skin cancer and other skin problems.

1. **Put on sunscreen.**

Use a sunscreen or sunblock with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15, even on cloudy days. Use a lot of sunscreen and rub it in well. You should put the sunscreen on 30 minutes before you go into the sun. Put the sunscreen everywhere the sun's rays might touch you, even your ears and the back of your neck. Men should also put it on any bald areas on the top of their head. Put more sunscreen on every hour or so if you're sweating or swimming.

Remember that using sunscreen is just part of a program to prevent skin cancer. To greatly lower your risk, you must follow all of the safe-sun guidelines.

1. **Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.**

If you have to be out in the sun, cover up your skin. A wide-brimmed hat will help protect your face, neck and ears from the sun. A hat with a 6-inch brim all around is the best. Baseball caps don't protect the back of your neck and the tops of your ears. Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from the sun. Choose sunglasses that block both ultraviolet-A (UVA) and ultraviolet-B (UVB) rays. Wearing sunglasses can protect your eyes from cataracts.

Wear protective clothing, such as long-sleeved shirts and long pants made of tightly woven fabric. If the clothes fit loosely they will be cooler. Special sun-protective clothes are available from several companies, like Solumbra Sun Precautions (telephone: 800-882-7860).

1. **Don't try to get a tan.**

Don't use tanning salons. Tanning booths damage your skin just like real sunlight does.

What else should I do?

Some doctors think it's a good idea to do a monthly skin check. Ask your doctor about this. If your doctor thinks it's a good idea for you, check your skin once a month for signs of skin cancer, such as moles. The earlier skin cancer is found, the greater the chance that it can be cured. Try doing your skin check on the same date every month. Pick a day that you can remember, like the date of your birthday or the day you pay bills.

Stand in front of a full-length mirror and use a hand-held mirror to check every inch of your skin, including the bottoms of your feet and the top of your head. Have someone help you check the top of your head. Try using a blow-dryer set on low speed to move your hair.

Look for any change in a mole or the appearance of a new mole. Any moles that appear after age 30 should be watched carefully and shown to your doctor.

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If you notice a mole that has changed, or if you have a new mole that doesn't look like your other moles, visit your doctor. Skin cancer can be treated successfully if it's treated early.

(Rev. October 2000)