

Skin Cancer: Are You Safe in the Sun?

Many people describe sun-tanned skin as a “healthy glow,” but nothing could be further from the truth. There is no such thing as a safe, healthy tan!

Sun Damage

Any type of suntan is the result of sun damage caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. Other types of sun damage include wrinkles, age spots, freckles, tough or leathery skin, dilated blood vessels, sunburn and skin cancer.

The sun emits two types of UV radiation: UVA (which causes aging) and UVB (which causes burning). Both UVA and UVB rays are undetectable to a person sitting in the sun – one cannot feel them on the skin – and both may be damaging on cool, cloudy days as well as sunny days. In addition, both types of radiation cause skin cancer.

Skin Cancer

People are most susceptible to skin cancer when they are exposed to sudden, short bursts of sunlight while in places where the sun is very strong, such as locations near the equator or at very high altitudes.

The following characteristics place people at an even higher risk of developing skin cancer:

- Having a large number of moles on the skin
- Being a redhead, blonde, and/or having blue eyes, fair skin, and freckles
- Difficulty tanning and skin is easily burned
- A family history of skin cancer
- Taking medication that increases sun sensitivity.

Preventing Sun Damage

The easiest way to prevent skin damage and lessen your chances of getting skin cancer is to avoid getting sunburn. Here are a few tips to help keep you safe in the sun:

- Stay out of the sun between 11am and 3pm.
- Wear clothes with tightly woven fabric along with a hat that shades your face, neck and ears.
- Wear sunglasses whenever you are outside to avoid developing cataracts and damaging your retinas.
- Use sunscreen that has at least 15 SPF (sun protection factor) every day, especially

- on your lips and the tips of your ears and nose.
- Avoid using tanning beds; they are just as damaging as the sun.
- Carefully protect children from sun damage. Two-thirds of skin damage occurs before age 15.

Avoiding excessive sun exposure and sunburn is the best way to protect you from sun damage and skin cancer. Routinely inspect your skin for any changes, and if you suspect that a spot on your skin is new, or has changed color or appearance, consult a dermatologist.



Did you know...?

Skin cancer attacks more than one million Americans every year and exposure to the sun causes over 90 percent of skin cancers in the United States.