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Protecting your skin from the sun and cancer

Sun safety tips

Over time, taking in the sun without any protection can lead to problems — from dry skin and wrinkles to skin cancer.

Skin cancer is actually the most common form of cancer. Family history can play a part in your risk of developing it. But bad sunburns, especially during childhood, increase your chances.

Here are a few tips you can use to enjoy your time in the sun, safely.

Cover up. Clothing and hats are good basic protection from the sun.

The sun's rays are strongest between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. During these hours, try to limit your time in the sun.

Sunscreen can help a lot. At the very least, use lotions with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15. But SPF 30 offers better protection. And remember to put more on every 1 to 2 hours, whether you are swimming or not.

Common skin cancers — and what to look for

While a darker skin color offers some natural protection from the sun, it does not make you immune to skin cancer.¹

So, it's important for everybody to keep an eye out for these common cancers. And ask your doctor to take a look. They can be treated easily if found early enough.

Basal cell carcinomas make up 80 percent of all skin cancers. They:

- Are usually pearly, slow-growing, raised areas that may crust and bleed
- Occur mostly on the head, face, ears, back and neck

Squamous cell carcinomas make up 15 percent of all skin cancers. They:

- Show as red or pink, scaly bumps
- Occur mostly on the head, face, ears, hands, arms and legs

Malignant melanomas are the most serious skin cancer. They:

- Can be fatal, but are treatable if found early
- Begin as a dark brown or flat black spot; may later change in shape or color
- May grow from a mole

¹Gohara M, Perez M. Skin cancer and skin of color. Skin Cancer Foundation. 2014. Available at www.skincancer.org/prevention/skin-cancer-and-skin-of-color. Accessed October 20, 2014.

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