

SIZZLING SUMMER FUN—THE FACTS ABOUT SUN DAMAGE

Summertime is usually the time of year that many people spend outdoors camping, swimming, barbecuing, or just soaking up the sunshine. Although these activities are fun and often physically active and healthy, it is important to remember that overexposure to the sun's powerful rays can cause serious harm.

How prevalent is skin cancer?

According to the Skin Cancer Foundation—

- One out of every five Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime.
- Generally, the risk of melanoma doubles if the person has had five or more sunburns.
- Approximately 90% of skin cancers (not including melanoma) are associated with increased exposure to ultraviolet rays.

What are ultraviolet (UV) rays?

UV rays are found in both natural sources (the sun) and artificial sources (tanning beds). There are three types of UV rays: UVA, UVB, and UVC. However, UVC rays do not reach the earth's surface and therefore do not harm the eyes and skin.

UVA: UVA rays penetrate all layers of the skin and account for about 95% of the sun's overall rays that reach the earth's surface. They are also equally intense at any time of the day or year and penetrate skin deeper than UVB. UVA rays are responsible for tanning, play a major part in skin aging, and have been shown to be linked to skin cancer.

UVB: UVB rays are responsible for sunburn and harm the outermost layers of the skin. Furthermore, they have also been linked to skin cancer. These rays are at the highest concentration between 10AM and 4PM and are especially harmful in high altitudes or near reflective surfaces.

What are the health risks of sun damage?

Eyes

Numerous long-term and severe eye problems can occur from sun damage. These can include cataracts, macular degeneration, corneal sunburn, and skin cancer around the eyelids.

Skin

Premature aging, such as wrinkling or leathery skin, abnormal skin growths, sunburn, and suppression of the immune system can all occur due to overexposure to UV rays.

Still, the most harmful consequence of skin damage caused by the sun is skin cancer. The most serious type of skin cancer is melanoma. Although severe, it can be curable if detected early. The table below lists the warning signs for moles or growths of melanoma.

The ABCs of Melanoma

A	"asymmetrical" = irregular shape or two non-identical parts
B	"border" = irregular or jagged borders
C	"color" = uneven color
D	"diameter" = larger than the size of a pea
E	"evolving" = changed shape or color within a short amount of time

How can I protect myself from sun damage?

Avoiding the sun altogether is not necessary. Even so, there are several things to remember when spending time outdoors. The table below lists some helpful tips to keep safe in the hot summer sun.

Item

Recommendation

<i>sunscreen</i>	apply sunscreen on all exposed skin before going outside; sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or greater works best; broad-spectrum sunscreen protects against UVA & UVB rays & provides the most coverage; reapply at least every 2 hours
<i>sunglasses</i>	wear sunglasses that protect against both UVA & UVB rays; wrap-around glasses work best to block rays from every angle
<i>hat</i>	wear a hat that is made out of canvas or another tightly woven fabric; a hat with a brim that goes all the way around works best
<i>clothing</i>	wear loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts or pants

Other Tips

- ✓ seek shade whenever possible
- ✓ avoid tanning (including tanning beds)
- ✓ have regular eye doctor and skin doctor visits for early damage detection

For informational purposes only; not meant to supersede the advice of a physician.
If you have questions regarding this information, please consult your medical professional.