



Take steps to protect your skin this summer



With the summer in full swing we look forward to hot days by the pool, picnics with friends and family, and many other outdoor activities. Unfortunately, while spending a lot of time in the sun, many of us have probably experienced bad sunburn.

I know I have!

Did you know that with every new sunburn, your chances of skin cancer increases? Everyone is vulnerable to sunburn. No matter who you are, protecting your skin from the sun is important!

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States today according to the Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/). With the proper prevention techniques you can protect yourself and your friends and family from becoming a victim of skin cancer.

Types of Skin Cancer

There are three main types of skin cancer: basal cell, squamous cell, and the most serious, melanoma. All three forms are caused most commonly by prolonged exposure to UV (ultraviolet) radiation coming from the sun and ultraviolet lamps used in indoor tanning salons.

Risk Factors for Skin Cancer

According to the American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org/docroot/lrn/lrn_0.asp) and the National Cancer Institute (www.cancernet.gov/cancertopics/wyntk/skin/page4), there are many risk factors that increase your chances of getting skin cancer. Some of these include:

- UV light exposure

- Having light or fair skin
- Age—Higher risk in the younger than older
- Being male
- Unusual moles and large number of moles
- Smoking
- Scars or burns on the skin
- Family history of skin cancer

Signs of Skin Cancer

The most common ways to detect skin cancer are a new growth on the skin or changes in an existing growth, like a mole. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends using the ABCDE of skin cancer when looking at your moles (www.aad.org/public/exams/abcde.html). The ABCDE's of skin cancer are:

- Assymetry—Normally moles are round and symmetrical, or the same on both sides. If you notice that one half of a mole is different from the other it may be cancerous.
- Border—Moles commonly have a smooth and even border surrounding them. In cancerous moles, you may notice that a mole has rough and uneven edges.
- Color—Moles are usually only one shade of brown. Moles that vary in colors like brown, black, tan, red, blue, or any other unusual color may be an early warning sign of cancer.
- Diameter—Moles generally are small in size and are no bigger than a pencil eraser. If you discover a mole that is larger than 5mm, or the tip of a pencil eraser, it may be cancerous.
- Evolving—Moles are normally unchanging. If you observe a mole that looks different from the others or is changing in color or size it may be an early sign of cancer

Doing self checks for irregular moles at home can prevent you from developing serious problem. Inspect your face, head, back, shoulders, and other areas that are most frequently exposed to the sun and have a family member help to inspect the parts of your body that you can't see. When looking for the ABCDE's of skin cancer talk to your doctor and have him or her look at any unusual changes you notice on your skin as soon as possible. Early detection is key in treating skin cancer.

Prevention

The Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/howto.htm) suggests that the best ways to prevent skin cancer are to:

- Stay in the shade — Stay inside or in the shade, especially during midday hours (10am.to4pm.), when UV rays are strongest and do the most damage to your skin.
- Cover up — Cover your skin with loose fitting clothing. A long-sleeved shirt and pants that block the sun from getting to your skin are best.
- Get a hat—Wear hats with a wide brim to shade the face, head, ears, and neck.
- Wear sunglasses—By sunglasses that wrap around your face and have lenses with UV protection.
- Use sunscreen—Use sunscreen with sun protective factor (SPF)15or higher, and both UVA and UVB (two types of UV rays) protection

Participating in cancer screening is one of the“10Keys”™ to Healthy Aging. Have your doctor examine your skin annually. Talk to

your doctor about any unusual changes in moles or irregularities on your skin.

Skin cancer is one of the most preventable cancers and also one of the easiest to treat if caught early. Have fun in the sun this summer, but remember to be smart and protect your skin to continue living for a “Healthier Tomorrow”!

This column was written by Kayse Gearhart, student intern for the Center for Healthy Aging. For more information on this article, please call 412-624-3217. The Center for Healthy Aging is part of the Department of Epidemiology in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Centers for Disease Control. For questions or more information contact David J. Fetterman, Director of Education and Community Outreach Coordinator at the Center for Healthy Aging at 412-383-321 or visit www.healthyangg.pitt.edu.

** In the last Healthier Tomorrow s column, the web sites where the information for the story was obtained were omitted. Following are those web sites:*

- www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hanta/hps/noframes/virus.htm
- www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm
- www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/
- www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm581a.htm
- www.emedicinehealth.com/swineful/article_em.htm
- www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/ga.htm
- www.cdc.gov/travel/notices.aspx
- cdcinfo@cdc.gov