

Sun Sanity

Today's skin cancer safety standards include banning the tan with daily sunscreen.

By Diane Y. Chapman

Healthy and "tan" are not synonymous. In fact, studies show exposing our skin to the sun is anything but healthy. Yet, Americans still buy into the concept of "tan is beautiful," to such a degree we risk our health regularly by sun-worshipping. Why does a sun-browned body have to be the facade?

Skin cancer is a fitness issue. Like heart disease and obesity, it is preventable through simple mea-

sures. And like those two diseases, it is tied to heredity and early childhood factors that haunt you as an adult. But, its worst effects can be avoided. As with any other health concern, education and preventative measures are the key. We can start with changing our daily life routines.

You would have to have spent the last decade living in a cave if you are not aware sun exposure promotes skin cancer. The Skin Cancer Foundation reports more than half a million Americans develop skin cancer each year. The American Academy of Dermatology reports it is almost universally accepted by medical experts skin cancer is caused by over-exposure to sunlight, especially in situations where sunburn and blistering are present.

A particularly frightening statistic is the growth of skin cancer in young people. It is not uncommon now for doctors to treat patients in their 20s. This is true even for melanoma, a condition that used to be rare in adults under 40. Melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer, is more common on the legs for women and on backs for men. This unusual fact has led researchers to believe burning associated with intermittent sunbathing is the strongest cause of melanoma and therefore the most dangerous type of sun exposure.

Malignant melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer, according to Lorrie Klein, M.D., a dermatologist in Laguna Niguel, a beach community in overly-sunny Southern California. Looking like an odd-shaped mole, it may change in color or appearance. The most curable and common skin cancer is basal cell carcinoma. Most likely to appear on the face and trunk, it is a slow-growing patch or bump usually red, yellow or pink in color. Another carcinoma, which is similar to basal cell, is squamous cell. Usually appearing on the face and arms, it may look like a non-healing scab.

Klein is quick to remind patients any spot or growth that has changed or continues to itch, crust, scab or bleed should be examined by a medical doctor knowledgeable in skin cancer. Early detection and treatment of skin cancer is successful in most cases.

Many of us would like to believe tanning

booths are a safe option for providing a golden tan color. However, over time UVA rays, which are found in tanning booths and natural sunlight, cause damaged blood vessels, skin cancer and premature aging resulting in wrinkles. The UVB rays, which are also emitted from natural sunlight and tanning booths, cause burning, premature aging and skin cancer.

Research has shown continual exposure to both types of UV rays promotes a high incidence of skin cancer, according to Klein. "I don't approve of tanning booths at all," she says. "Tanning booths use primarily UVA rays, which penetrate more deeply into the skin."

We can stop using tanning booths, but nobody can completely hide from daylight to avoid the harmful effects of the sun. Using a good sunscreen every day, cloudy or sunny, and avoiding sun exposure between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. are the first steps. To safely deflect and scatter UV rays, sunscreen should be applied liberally all over the body, face, neck and ears.

Klein suggests keeping sunscreen with your toothpaste to remind you of daily use. If you are a Retin-A user sunscreen is an absolute must—even indoors. "Even if you are just driving in the car, you should have it on," she says. "Women should use it as a moisturizer or under makeup—makeup containing sunscreen is not enough. Remember, too, fair-skinned individuals need a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 plus."

Despite all the information about prevention, and the fact Americans are using more sunscreen, it's yet to be evident if the ever-increasing number of skin cancer cases will decrease. Unfortunately, the biggest hurdle is deposing the perception a tan symbolizes status and health.

So, skip the tanning booth or the sunbathing this weekend. Avoid the sun now in order to avoid skin cancer later. ☑

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