

Want to Prevent Skin Cancer? Go Undercover!

By Camille Bartus, FCPS Wellness Specialist



The media has popularized the look of a “bronze tan” as a symbol of health and beauty, however, with the rise in skin cancer diagnosis and deaths, consumers are realizing they are putting themselves at a great health risk to achieve this look.

According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. One in five Americans will develop skin cancer in the course of a lifetime and approximately 1 million new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed per year. The two most common types of skin cancers are basal cell and squamous cell cancer which account for most of the skin cancers diagnosed each year. Melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, accounts for only 3% of skin cancers, however, it is responsible for 75% of the deaths related to skin cancer. The incidence of melanoma is increasing faster than that of almost any other form of cancer.

Anyone can get skin cancer but it is seen most frequently in people who:

- Spend increased time exposed to ultraviolet light from the sun, sun lamps or tanning beds
- Had a blistering sunburn(s) as a child or teen
- Have light colored skin, eyes, and hair
- Have a family member who already had skin cancer
- Are over age 50

The good news is you **can** reduce your risk of developing this potentially disfiguring and lethal cancer, by regularly practicing common sense strategies. The American Cancer Society (ACS) and Centers for Disease Control recommend the following strategies for preventing skin cancer:

- Seek shade and stay out of the direct sun especially during the hours of 11:00a.m. and 3:00 p.m.
- Apply a sunscreen at least 30 minutes before sun exposure with an SPF of 15 and higher that blocks both UVA and UVB rays. Remember to re-apply it according to the manufacturer’s directions at least every 2 hours, after getting wet, sweating a lot or toweling off.
- Wear protective clothing, usually darker colors or heavier weave clothing. If you are not able to do this due to the heat, cover as much of your body as possible and use suntan lotion wisely on all exposed parts of your body. Go to the Skin Cancer Foundation to get more information on proper sunscreen use: <http://www.skincancer.org/sunscreen/sunscreens-explained.html>
- Wear wraparound sun glasses that provide 100% UV protection
- Avoid tanning beds and tanning salons which are a source of ultraviolet light exposure

It is also important to do regular scans of your entire body from your head to your toes. Look particularly for suspicious moles using the ABCD rule to:

- A** – Asymmetrical shape
- B** – Irregular borders
- C** – Varied color and not the same all over
- D** – Diameter bigger than an eraser on a pencil or 6mm

Make sure to see a dermatologist for an annual check up and if you find any suspicious looking lesions. Check out the ACS website for a more detailed description of the scan and ABCD tool: http://www.aad.org/public/publications/pamphlets/sun_skin.html.

Share this important information and the following resources with your family and friends.

Skin Cancer Resources:

Take Your Sun Safety IQ test:

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_7_1x_Take_the_Sun_Safety_Quiz.asp

Sun exposure Q&A

<http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/chooseyourcover/qanda.htm>

American Academy of Dermatology Skin Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment

http://www.aad.org/public/publications/pamphlets/sun_skin.html

American Cancer Society Skin Cancer Prevention and Early Detection

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/ped_7_1_Skin_Cancer_Detection_What_You_Can_Do.asp

The Case against Indoor Tanning

<http://www.skincancer.org/artificial/index.php>

Tanning Beds May Increase Skin Cancer Risk

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/NWS/content/NWS_1_1x_Tanning_Beds_May_Increase_Skin_Cancer_Risk.asp