

Make changes now to protect skin from sun, correct damage done

by Beth Stambaugh

Remember the days of lounging in the sun in hopes of having that perfect tan? No doubt, the days of overtly worshipping the sun are long gone. But even though most of us have abandoned the baby oil and opt for smarter sunning, many still venture out without enough protection.

One in five Americans will develop skin cancer in the course of a lifetime, making it the most common type of cancer in the United States, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. More than 3.5 million cases are diagnosed annually.

So, what can you do to protect yourself from the sun's harmful rays and undo past damage?

Know Your Risk Factors

"Having fair skin and light eyes, a family history of skin cancer, years of outdoor exposure and prior sun damage all increase your risk of skin cancer," explains Dr. Michael Lutz, M.D., a dermatologist in the San Jose area.

Although these risk factors may make skin cancer more likely, nobody is really immune – especially in the sunshine state. "Even dark-skinned people can develop skin cancer," he said. "But your chances increase if you are at high risk."

Find a Sunscreen You Like

With so many options to choose from, figuring out what kind of sunscreen to buy can be overwhelming. "Try several differ-

ent kinds – ointments, gels, sticks, spray-on varieties, until you find one you are comfortable with and will use regularly." Many dermatologists offer free samples.

The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recommends using a broad-spectrum sunscreen year-round with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15. Put it on 30 minutes before exposure and make sure your skin is dry and clean.

"Your bottle shouldn't last all summer," said Dr. Lutz. He said to apply at least one full ounce to adequately protect your skin, and reapply at least every two hours. He reminds patients to cover up with a wide-brimmed hat and light-weight clothing, especially if they fall into the high-risk category.

Go Natural

Many doctors advocate organic sunscreens because of the potentially damaging effects of chemicals found in regular sunscreens. Controversy abounds on the issue, but Jacksonville plastic surgeon Dr. Lewis Obi, M.D. recommends using a sunscreen with natural agents, such as zinc oxide and herbal sunblocks rather than most FDA approved chemical sunscreens. If going organic is important to you, look for the USDA organic seal on the label.

Start Young

"Sun exposure during childhood produces the greatest risk for skin cancer," said Dr. Obi. "Just two or three sunburns under age 16 can greatly increase your risk for skin cancer." He advocates the use of sun shirts for kids, combined with sunscreen and avoiding the sun during the hottest times of the day. "Sunscreen alone won't hack it," he said. "You need to protect yourself in a number of ways, including limiting your sun exposure."

Reversing Sun Damage

There are some treatments that can actually reverse the signs of skin damage. Molly Steen, an esthetician with Ponte Vedra Plastic Surgery, explained that chemical peels can be an effective way to exfoliate the skin and reverse some of the photo aging from the sun, like dark pigmentations. Chemical peels start at about \$65 and can go up to \$500, depending on what type you get and where you go.

Steen recommends using a vitamin C serum underneath sunscreen. "Vitamin C is an antioxidant that protects your skin from free radicals, like pollution and the sun. Combined with sunscreen, you can help prevent sun damage." She added that sunscreen must be used every day, even on cloudy days.

Other treatments that can be effective in reversing skin damage are IPL (Intense Pulse Light) and laser therapy. There are some prescription-based creams on the market that can eliminate pre-cancerous lesions as well.

Opt for Sun-Free Alternatives

Although it's not the answer most want to hear, limiting your sun exposure is your best line of defense.

"The best preventative measure for skin cancers and premature photo aging is avoiding sun exposure," said Dr. Obi. "Pop culture's brainwashing of the general public in regards to the tanned look has had a significant negative effect in regards to public health."

To get that sun-kissed look without the damage, try sun-free alternatives like bronzers, spray-on tanners and tanning lotions. Steen said to opt for mineral-based bronzers, which have antioxidants and make the skin look more vibrant.



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