



## Lowering Skin Cancer Risk is Simple

Prevention, early detection and treatment are keys to reducing melanoma.

BY JANICE PHELAN

**W**ith close to 20 percent of Americans developing skin cancer during their lifetimes, prevention, early detection and prompt treatment are critical.

When it comes to prevention, you can significantly lower your risk of developing skin cancer by protecting yourself against ultraviolet (UV) radiation, a proven human carcinogen, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. The sun, as well as indoor tanning devices, are both considered sources of UV radiation.

“Approximately 90 percent of non-melanoma skin cancers and 86 percent of melanomas are associated with UV radiation from the sun,” said Dr. Kim Nichols, a dermatologist practicing in Greenwich, Conn., and a spokesperson for the Skin Cancer Foundation. “The good news is that you can protect yourself from the dangers UV rays pose — and consequently, lower your risk of developing skin cancer.”

The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends a sun protection strategy that includes:

- seeking shade
- covering up with clothing, hats and sunglasses
- wearing sunscreen each day

“Clothing is the most effective form of sun protection — it is our first line of defense against the sun’s harmful rays,” Nichols said. “It is also less complicated than sunscreen, since you do not need to worry about adequate application and reapplication.”

The dermatologist recommends wearing a hat with a brim that extends three inches or more all the way around to shade your face, neck and ears. For



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sunscreen, select a broad-spectrum formula with an SPF of at least 15 or higher each day and use water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher for extended outdoor activities. You also should reapply sunscreen every two hours or immediately after swimming or sweating.

“Lastly, seek the shade when you can, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun’s rays are strongest,” Nichols added.

Just five or more sunburns during your lifetime will double your risk of developing melanoma, a serious type of skin cancer, making prevention especially important.

In addition to avoiding UV exposure, the Skin Cancer Foundation encourages everyone to see their dermatologist annually for a professional skin exam.

“We know that when skin cancers are caught early, they are highly treatable,” Nichols said. “The larger and deeper a tumor grows, the more dangerous and potentially disfiguring it may become, and the more extensive the treatment must be.”

You also should perform a self-exam on your own skin once a month, she added.

“Skin cancers can have an incredibly varied appearance, but the bottom line is if you see something new, changing or unusual, get it checked by a dermatologist as soon as possible,” Nichols said. “This includes any new moles, moles that change size or shape, a growth that won’t stop itching or bleeding, or an open sore that won’t heal within three weeks.”

Skin cancer also can resemble something as nondescript as a pimple or crusty red patch, so the dermatologist encourages individuals to check their skin frequently and take note of any changes that may need to be seen by a medical professional.

For more information, visit the Skin Cancer Foundation website at [www.skincancer.org](http://www.skincancer.org).

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