

What You Need to Know About Skin Cancer (but were afraid to ask!)

Skin cancer is the most common cancer, but is easily preventable and treatable if discovered early.

Am I at risk for skin cancer?

- ✗ If you live in Texas, the answer is almost certainly Yes! Texans have a one in three chance of developing skin cancer!



Why should I worry about skin cancer? My parents and grandparents had never heard of it.

- ✗ Skin cancer rates are rising every decade. Scientists think one reason for this is a change in the earth's atmosphere that allows more Ultraviolet (UV) radiation through. Also, we don't wear clothes that cover most of our bodies like our parents and grandparents did.

What causes skin cancer?

- ✗ Sunlight contains Ultraviolet-A (UV-A) and Ultraviolet-B (UV-B) light bands. UV-B light is strongest at midday and causes sunburn. UV-A is present more consistently all day. It causes tanning, thickening and wrinkling of the skin, cataracts of the eyes, and can depress the immune system. Both UV-A and UV-B can cause skin cancer.



What about indoor tanning?



- ✗ Many tanning parlors advertise that their beds are "safe." However, scientists now believe that the UV-A light used in tanning beds actually penetrates the skin to cause damage at a deeper level than UV-B light. The bottom line is that anything that causes the skin to tan or burn is actually damaging the skin and placing you at increased risk of skin cancer someday.

What can I do about skin cancer?



We're glad you asked! There are six simple steps you can take that will dramatically reduce your risk of getting skin cancer.

- ✘ Use sunscreen with a SPF (Sun Protection Factor) of at least 15.
- ✘ Reapply sunscreen regularly about every two hours and after swimming or strenuous activity.
- ✘ Cover up in the sun. A lightweight, long sleeved shirt, long pants, and hat with at least a 3" brim will help protect your skin.
- ✘ Wear sunglasses. They can provide UV protection for your eyes. (Choose ones with UV protective lenses.)
- ✘ Avoid direct sun between the hours of 10AM and 4PM and stay away from tanning beds.
- ✘ Check your skin regularly. Look for new moles or changes in existing moles, dark patches, or long lasting pearly-looking bumps. Tell your doctor about any changes!



That's it! A little knowledge goes a long way in preventing skin cancer, and you can lower your risk by making a few simple changes. Protect yourself and those you love by developing sensible habits for being in the sun!

References: <http://coolshade.tamu.edu> (Texas AgriLife Extension Service)
<http://www.cancer.org> (American Cancer Society)
<http://www.ada.org> (American Academy of Dermatology)

Prepared by: Laura Strawn, MA, RN and Jennifer Janssen, MEd