

eHouseCall

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A Monthly Electronic Newsletter from HealthLink

Doctor's Bag



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Baby Your Baby's Skin

While it is true that malignant melanoma is the most common cancer among adults in their mid to late twenties, in many cases it is likely that blistering sunburns during childhood contributed to the onset of this most deadly form of skin cancer.

Unprotected skin can become damaged by UV rays in fewer than 15 minutes – in bright sunlight and even if the sky is cloudy. Don't expose your child to the elements without proper sun protection.

Start with Sunscreen

Sunscreen is a good start but keep in mind, it will not provide 100% of the protection your child needs. Choose SPF of 30 or higher with both UVA and UVB protection.

Add a Hat

If your child won't wear a hat that shades the face, ears, neck and scalp, a baseball hat will work as long as you apply sunscreen to the unprotected places.

And Sunglasses

UV rays can cause cataracts later in life. As soon as it is practical, have your child wear wrap-arounds that block as close to 100% of UVA and UVB rays.

Practice What You Preach

The best way to convince your children of the value of sun protection is to protect yourself, too. The healthy habits you practice while your children are young are some of the best, lifelong gifts you can give them.

HLInfo YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO HEALTH CARE AWARENESS

JULY

Baby Your Skin!

There is no such thing as a safe suntan, and there are three major classifications of skin cancer to prove it: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma.



Basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas can cause serious illness and disfigurement if left untreated. If detected early, both forms of skin cancer are nearly 100% curable.

Malignant melanoma causes three-fourths of all deaths from skin cancer. If treated at an early stage, the disease is usually curable. If diagnosed too late, it can be fatal.

Malignant Melanoma: Risk Factors

Anyone can develop malignant melanoma. However, the American Cancer Society lists the following among the main risk factors for developing the disease:

Moles

Dysplastic, or atypical, moles can appear on both covered and uncovered areas of the skin. Individuals with many and/or large dysplastic moles are at increased risk. If you suspect a mole may be dysplastic, have your family doctor take a look.

Fair skin, fair hair, freckles

The risk is significantly greater for blonds and redheads with light skin and freckling.

Family history

About 10% of all individuals with malignant melanoma have a family history of the cancer.

Immune suppression

Individuals who are taking medications that suppress the immune system – e.g., transplant patients – are at greater risk of melanoma.

Over-exposure to UV rays

Individuals who undergo excessive exposure to UV rays, whether from sunlight or a tanning apparatus, are at greater risk of skin cancer, including melanoma.

Age

The older you get, the more likely you are to develop melanoma. 70 year olds are twice as likely to contract the disease as 45 year olds.

Gender

1 in 57 men are likely to develop melanoma during their lifetime, compared to 1 in 81 women.

DidUKnow?

- ♦ Ultraviolet radiation (exposure to sunlight) is the most common cause of both melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers.
- ♦ UV rays from artificial sources of light, such as tanning beds and sun lamps, are just as dangerous as those from the sun.
- ♦ More than 1 million cases of basal cell or squamous cell cancer are diagnosed each year.
- ♦ This year, more than 62,400 persons will be diagnosed with the most deadly form of skin cancer, malignant melanoma
- ♦ More than 11,000 individuals are expected to die from some form of skin cancer during 2008.
- ♦ Malignant melanoma can spread to other organs, most commonly the lungs and liver.
- ♦ Important warning signs of melanoma include changes in size, shape, or color of a skin lesion or the appearance of a new growth on the skin.
- ♦ Basal cell carcinomas may appear as growths that are flat, firm, pale areas or as small, raised, pink or red, translucent, shiny areas that may bleed following minor injury.
- ♦ Squamous cell cancer may appear as growing lumps, often with a rough surface, or as flat, reddish patches that grow slowly. Another sign of basal and squamous cell skin cancers is a sore that doesn't heal.

INFORMATION SOURCES:

American Cancer Society, "Cancer Facts and Figures 2008" (www.cancer.org); Skin Cancer Foundation, "2008 Skin Cancer Facts" (www.skincancer.org); MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health, "Skin Cancer" (www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/skincancer.html)

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