The Galleria Chamber of Commerce
Health & Wellness Committee

Healthy Living Monthly Newsletter

July 2009 Edition

Health Topic of the Month:

July is Skin Safety Month

Are dangers of UV exposure the same for everyone?

Factors such as age, health, and skin type all determine how an individual will be affected by UV exposure.

People over the age of 50 and under the age of 5 are generally more sensitive to the harmful effects of UV. Those with immune deficiencies and chronic diseases also tend to be more susceptible to the side-effects of UV exposure.

In general, people with medium to dark complexions are less sensitive to UV exposure. Although people with darker complexions are less likely to get skin cancer than people with lighter complexions, they can still develop malignancies and suffer all forms of UV damage.

Dermatologists divide human skin into six types. Type I is the most sensitive and type VI is the least sensitive. People with skin type I are at a particularly high risk and should try to avoid exposure to UV.

People who need to be especially careful in the sun are those who have:

- Pale skin
- Blonde, red, or light brown hair
- Been treated for skin cancer
- A family member who's had skin cancer

Certain oral and topical medicines, such as antibiotics, birth control pills, and benzoyl peroxide products, as well as some cosmetics, may increase skin and eye sensitivity to UV in all skin types. Check the label and ask your doctor for more information.

Sunburn

What it is:

Sunburn, also called erythema, is one of the most obvious signs of UV exposure and skin damage. Often marked by redness and peeling (usually after a few days), sunburn is a form of short-term skin damage.

Why it happens:

When UV rays reach your skin, they damage cells in the epidermis. In response, your immune system increases blood flow to the affected areas. The increased blood flow is what gives sunburn its characteristic redness and makes the skin feel warm to the touch. At the same time, the damaged skin cells release chemicals that send messages through the body until they are translated as a painful burning sensation by the brain.

White blood cells, which help protect you from infection and disease, attack and remove the damaged skin cells. It is this process of removing damaged cells that can cause sunburned skin to itch and peel.

Symptoms:

The earliest signs of sunburn are skin that looks flushed, is tender or painful, or gives off more heat than normal. Unfortunately, if your skin tone is medium to dark you may not notice any obvious physical signs until several hours later. It can take 6 - 48 hours for the full effects of sunburn to appear.

Treatment:

The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recommends treating mild sunburn with cool baths, over-the-counter hydrocortisone creams, and aspirin to ease pain and swelling.

Severe sunburn should be treated as a medical emergency and examined by a doctor right away. Severe sunburn is often characterized by a large area of red, blistered skin with a headache, fever, or chills.

The Bottom Line:

Sunburn can be a very painful effect of UV exposure. Studies have shown a link between severe sunburn and melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. Getting even one sunburn can increase your risk for skin cancer, so pay careful attention to protecting yourself from UV rays.

Sun Tan

What it is:

There is no such thing as a safe tan. The increase in skin pigment, called melanin, which causes the tan color change in your skin is a sign of damage.

Why it happens:

Once skin is exposed to UV radiation, it increases the production of melanin in an attempt to protect the skin from further damage. Melanin is the same pigment that colors your hair, eyes, and skin. The increase in melanin may cause your skin tone to darken over the next 48 hours.

Symptoms:

Skin tones that are capable of developing a tan, typically skin types II through V, will probably darken in tone within two days.

The Bottom Line:

Evidence suggests that tanning greatly increases your risk of developing skin cancer. And, contrary to popular belief, getting a tan will not protect your skin from sunburn or other skin damage. The extra melanin in tanned skin provides a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of about 2 to 4; far below the minimum recommended SPF of 15.

Sun Protection

The best way to protect your skin from the dangerous effects of UV radiation is to make sun protection part of your daily routine.

Remember that certain oral and topical medicines, including antibiotics, birth control, and benzoyl peroxide products can increase the sensitivity of your skin and eyes to UV rays. Check the label on your medicines and discuss the risks with your doctor.

Cosmetics that contain alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs) also may increase sun sensitivity and susceptibility to sunburn. Look for FDA’s recommended sun alert statement on products that contain AHAs.

The sections below outline the basic methods of sun protection and offer several tips for integrating sun protection into your daily routine.

Sun Protection Tips

- Avoid overexposure to UV rays from both natural and artificial sources.
- Plan your outdoor activities to avoid the sun's strongest rays. As a rule, seek shade and remember that the sun’s UV rays are the strongest between 10am and 4pm. You can also use the “shadow rule”; the sun’s UV rays are strongest when the shadow you cast on the ground is shorter than you are.
- Use extra caution near water, snow, and sand because they reflect damaging UV rays and increase your chance of sunburn and other damage to the skin and eyes.
- Wear protective clothing such as wide-brimmed hats, and long pants and long-sleeved shirts made of tightly-woven fabric to reduce sun exposure.
- Wear sunglasses that provide 100% UV ray protection (look for models that advertise both UVB and UVA protection).
- Use a broad-spectrum (protecting from both UVA and UVB) sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or greater to protect uncovered skin. For best results, apply the sunscreen 30 minutes before sun exposure and reapply every 1-1/2 to 2 hours even on cloudy days and after swimming or sweating. Both selection of the sunscreen and re-applications are important.
- Carefully examine all of your skin once a month. Early detection of melanoma can save your life. A new or changing skin lesion should be evaluated by a dermatologist.
- See a dermatologist if you notice an unusual mole, a scaly patch, or a sore with local persistent bleeding or that does not heal. This may be a pre-cancer or a skin cancer. If you develop severe itching or rashes in the sun, this may be an allergic reaction.

Protective Clothing

A wide-brimmed hat that shields your face and shoulders will provide the most protection. Optimally, the brim will be at least 4 inches wide and made of tightly-woven, opaque fibers. Loosely woven straw hats provide very little sun protection. As a rule of thumb, do not wear a hat if you can see light shining through the fabric.

Clothing can also help protect you from UV rays. Tightly-woven, light-colored, lightweight fabrics will provide you with the most comfort and protection.

Sun-protective clothing and swimsuits are now available in stores. However, these products are not regulated by FDA.

Sunglasses

Choose sunglasses that are labeled with a UVA/UVB rating of 100% to provide the most UV protection.

Do not mistake dark-tinted sunglasses as having more UV protection. The darkness of the lens does not indicate its ability to shield your eyes from UV rays. Many sunglasses with light-colored tints, such as green, amber, red, and gray offer the same UV protection as very dark lenses.

Children should also wear sunglasses that indicate the UV protection level. Toy sunglasses may not have any UV protection, so be sure to look for the UV protection label.

Large, wraparound-style frames may provide more efficient UV protection because they cover the entire eye-socket. This is especially important when doing activities around or on water because much of the UV comes from light reflected off the water's surface.

Sunglasses are the most effective when worn with a wide-brimmed hat and sunscreen.

Sunscreen

Sunscreens provide a chemical barrier that absorbs or reflects UV radiation and prevent the passage of UV to the skin. They include chemical ingredients such as titanium dioxide and zinc and are available in the form of lotions, sprays, gels, wax sticks, and creams.

How to Choose:

Sunscreens are made in a wide range of SPFs, or sun protection factors. As a general rule, the higher the SPF number, the more protection against sunburn and other skin damage the sunscreen provides. To get the most protection out of sunscreen, choose one with an SPF of at least 15. If your skin is fair, types I to III, you may want a higher minimum SPF of 30 to 50.

When shopping for sunscreen, chose one that is labeled as broad-spectrum because it will help protect you from both UVA and UVB rays. Check the sunscreen label for broad-spectrum ingredients such as those listed in the table below.

Examples of Broad-Spectrum Ingredients

Ingredients	Other Names
Benzophenones	Oxybenzone
Cinnamates	Octinoxate Cinoxate
Ecamsule	Mexoryl SX
Sulisobenzone	

Salicylates	
Titanium Dioxide	
Zinc Oxide	
Avobenzone	Parsol 1789

Some sunscreens are labeled as being water-resistant. These products stay on skin longer even if they get wet from pool or ocean water, or sweat. But water-resistant does not mean water-proof. Water resistant sunscreen still needs to be reapplied, so check the label for reapplication times.

How to Use:

As a rule, apply an SPF 15 or higher sunscreen 30 minutes before you go outside so the product has time to soak into your skin and provide the maximum benefit. You should apply sunscreen everyday, even if it is cloudy.

Apply a liberal amount of sunscreen to your entire face (avoiding the eyes and mouth) and body, taking extra care to cover frequently forgotten spots:

- Ears
- Nose
- Lips
- Back of neck
- Tops of feet
- Along the hairline
- Areas of the head exposed by balding or thinning hair

An average-size adult or child needs at least one ounce of sunscreen, about the amount it takes to fill a shot glass—to evenly cover the body from head to toe.

Ask a doctor before applying sunscreen to children under 6 months of age.

Check the label and reapply sunscreen according to the instructions. Sunscreens typically need to be reapplied at least every two hours.

- A special THANK YOU to M.D. Anderson Cancer Center and the U.S. Food & Drug Administration for this terrific information.

The Galleria Chamber of Commerce's Health & Wellness Committee meets monthly on the SECOND Tuesday of each month, unless otherwise notified.

If you would like more information on our meetings or participation,

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