

SKIN SIZZLIN' SEASON:

Dermatologist Jane Chew, M.D., Provides Skin Cancer Advice

WHILE A NUMBER OF FACTORS PLAY A PART IN DETERMINING WHO HAS A HIGHER RISK FOR DEVELOPING SKIN CANCER, EVERYONE NEEDS PROTECTION FROM THE SUN, REGARDLESS OF AGE OR SKIN COLOR. AS THE WARM WEATHER BRINGS DAYS IN THE SUNSHINE AT THE BEACH OR POOL, DERMATOLOGIST JANE CHEW, M.D., IS COMMITTED TO PROMOTING SKIN SAFETY IN THE SUN. ASIDE FROM OFFERING SEVERAL FREE SKIN CANCER SCREENINGS TO AREA RESIDENTS, DR. CHEW HAS PROVIDED ANSWERS TO SOME OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING EXPOSURE TO THE SUN'S DANGEROUS ULTRAVIOLET RAYS.

Q: How does too much sun exposure affect my skin?

A: Too much sun exposure is the leading cause of wrinkles and brown spots. With chronic sun exposure, the middle layer of the skin (dermis) becomes thinner and more lax. This may lead to sagging skin. Basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma skin cancers are all associated with too much sun exposure.

Q: What does SPF mean and which number is best to use?

A: SPF stands for Sun Protection Factor. Multiply the SPF number by the number of minutes it takes your skin to start burning without protection. For example, if you start burning after 10 minutes, SPF 15 has been shown in lab tests to protect you for 150 minutes. After SPF 30, the difference in effectiveness is less dramatic, but I still recommend wearing the highest SPF you can find.



Q: How often should I reapply sunscreen?

A: Apply sunscreen at least an hour before sun exposure and then reapply it at least every two hours. If you are sweating or in the water, you may need to reapply sunscreen more frequently. Don't forget to apply sunscreen to your ears, scalp and feet.

Q: What makes people more prone to skin cancer?

A: Everyone is at risk for skin cancer, no matter what your skin type. You may be at a higher risk for skin cancer if it runs in your family, if you are very fair, if you have had a blistering sunburn or if you have had chronic sun exposure.

Q: What can I do to reduce pain or swelling due to sun exposure?

A: If you have a sunburn, aspirin or Tylenol may help the inflammation. Soaking in a cool bath may also help relieve the stinging sensation. For a severe burn you may need to see a doctor for prescription medication.

Q: Are tanning beds a safe way to obtain a tan?

A: There is no such thing as a safe tan. A tan is a reaction by your skin in response to an injury, which in this case, is caused by ultraviolet light. There is no wavelength of ultraviolet light that is safe for the skin. Frequent use of tanning beds may increase your risk of certain skin cancers.