

SKIN CANCER PREVENTION

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What damage occurs with sunlight?

Sunlight is the main source of ultraviolet radiation (UV) that is known to damage skin and to cause cancer in humans following long-term exposure. The amount of UV exposure depends on the strength of the light, the length of exposure, and whether the skin is protected. The immediate results of unprotected exposure to the sun's UV rays are sunburn and tanning. With long-term exposure, the sun may cause prematurely aged skin, wrinkles, loss of elasticity and skin cancers.

How do I protect myself from UV?

It is impossible to completely avoid sunlight. Some people think about sun protection only when they spend a full day at the beach or pool. Sun exposure adds up day after day and it happens whenever you are in the sun. Exposure can occur when you are gardening, fishing, riding a bike or attending a baseball game. The following are steps that provide a practical approach to protecting yourself from the effects of the sun:

- Limit direct sun exposure during midday (10 AM to 4 PM).
- Cover up with light colored, tightly woven, protective clothing.
- Wear a hat (preferably wide-brimmed).
- Use a sunscreen with a skin protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.
- Be sure to apply sunscreen 20 to 30 minutes before going outside and don't forget your ears, face, nose, lips and the top of your feet.
- Wear sunglasses that block UV rays.
- Avoid sunlamps and tanning booths.
- Some medications may make you more susceptible to sunburn. Check with your pharmacist regarding photosensitivity and your medication.
- Check your skin regularly using the "ABCD Rule" (see other side).

“ABCD Rule” for Detection of Melanoma

Melanoma is the most aggressive and deadly of all skin cancers. Melanoma may suddenly appear without warning, but also may begin in or near a mole or other dark spot in the skin. If you notice any suspicious changes, notify your physician.

- **A is for ASYMMETRY:** One side of a mole or birthmark does not match the other side.
- **B is for BORDER:** The edges are irregular, ragged, or blurred.
- **C is for COLOR:** The color is not the same all over, but may have differing shades of brown or black, sometimes with patches of red, white, or blue.
- **D is for DIAMETER:** The area is larger than 6 millimeters (about the size of a pencil eraser) or is growing larger.

The most important warning sign for skin cancer is a spot on the skin that is changing in size, shape, or color over a period of one month to two years.

How do I examine my skin using the “ABCD Rule”?

1. Examine your body monthly with the help of a mirror: front and back, then your right and left sides with your arms raised.
2. Bend your elbows and look carefully at your forearms, underarms and palms.
3. Look at the back of your legs, your feet, your soles, and the spaces between your toes.
4. Use a mirror to examine the back of your neck and behind your ears.
5. Check your scalp with the help of a hand mirror; part and lift your hair to give yourself a closer look.
6. Visit your physician annually.