

Melanoma Awareness

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May is Melanoma Awareness Month and a good time to consider your skin health. The lifetime risk of developing a melanoma has risen faster than any other solid malignancy. With the warmer weather upon us, there are measures you can take to minimize your skin risk of developing melanoma, other skin cancers, or sun-damaged skin.

Wearing sunscreen every day should be a priority to protect you from the sun's harmful rays. Sunscreen is not just for sunny days. Even on a cloudy day, up to 80% of the sun's ultraviolet rays can pass through the clouds. Sunscreen should not be used to prolong recreational activities alone. Rather, sunscreen should be used in conjunction with other forms of protection such as hats, sunglasses, and clothing. Seek shade when appropriate, and try to avoid direct exposure when the sun's rays are strongest between 10am and 4pm.

When selecting a sunscreen product, it is important that it is a broad-spectrum, water-resistant product that blocks both UVA and UVB rays and has a sun protection rating factor (SPF) of at least 30. Sunscreen should always be applied at least 30 minutes prior to sun exposure and reapplied every two hours or after swimming or perspiring heavily. Even so-called "water-resistant" sunscreens may lose their effectiveness after 40 minutes in the water. Coat the skin liberally and rub in thoroughly. One ounce, enough to fill a shot glass, is considered the amount needed to cover the exposed areas of the body properly.

Avoid the use of tanning beds and sun lamps. In spite of claims that tanning beds are a safe alternative for sun tanning, indoor equipment does emit UVA and UVB radiation. The amount of radiation produced during indoor tanning is similar to the sun and in some cases may be stronger.

With the knowledge we have today about the risk of developing skin cancer, it is only prudent to turn that knowledge into smart, proactive, and preventative measures to ensure our health.