

Preventing Skin Cancer By Barbara Grassley

Written by Grassley Press
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With Memorial Day over and temperatures climbing, summer is just about upon us. The season is a good reminder of the need to focus on sun safety and skin cancer prevention. Like most ways to reduce your risk for cancer, the preventive steps may be easy but committing to them isn't. It may be difficult to make the right choices, especially for teen-agers and young adults, because the risks and consequences seem remote and improbable. However, the facts tell us otherwise.

Skin cancer is on the rise among young people between 18 and 39; the Skin Cancer Foundation says the rates of skin cancer have grown by 800 percent among young women and 400 percent among young men over the past 40 years, despite an increase in knowledge. Why? Perhaps looking good now triumphs protecting oneself to be healthy later in life. Too many people who spend time outdoors still fail to regularly and properly apply sunscreen. Whether you seek a tan inside or outside, tanning is dangerous. In the last decade, tanning salons have become popular, especially among teens. The ads from tanning salons appear around this time of year and offer student discounts. Tanning may seem like just another example of typical teen-age vanity, but this behavior is dangerous.

People who begin indoor tanning at a younger age have a 75 percent higher risk of melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. "Tanning bed use during high school and college conferred a higher risk of basal cell carcinoma (BCC) than did tanning bed use between ages 25 and 35," said Dr. Mingfeng Zhang, a research fellow at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School. In fact, just one indoor tanning session a year while the subjects were in high school or college boosted their risk of developing BCC by 10 percent, and those who tanned indoors more than six times a year had an 82 percent higher risk of developing BCC than non-tanners. It is estimated that 2.3 million teens visit a tanning salon at least once a year.

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Regardless of age, we all must be more vigilant. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States; indeed, it is the fastest-growing cancer, affecting more than two million people each year. One person dies every hour from melanoma, the deadliest form of the disease, and an estimated 8,790 people will die from it this year in the United States. In Iowa alone, 980 new cases of skin cancer are expected to be diagnosed this year. To reduce your risk of skin cancer, follow these sun safety tips:

- Regularly apply sunscreen. Use sunscreen and lip balm with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 or higher, and remember to reapply. Sunscreen should be reapplied at least every two hours and after swimming or sweating. Make sure to use an ounce – two tablespoons -- of sunscreen on your face and enough to generously cover your body. If one bottle lasts you all summer, then you're not applying enough!
- Although you can get sunburned at any time of day, the sun's rays are strongest between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Stay out of the sun during these hours!
- Don't forget to slip on your shades! Wear sunglasses with 100 percent ultraviolet ray absorption to protect your eyes and their surrounding skin.

Even when you're serious about protecting your skin, you may sometimes want the glow of a tan. Luckily, many bronzers and sunless tanning products are widely available on the market from high end retailers to local pharmacies.

And parents, you are wise to protect your children early on and teach them safety habits as they grow more independent. They may fight you now, but when they are in their 30s and 40s and beyond, they will love you for it. For those of us who are older, it's never too late to start making the right choices. Start each day with a moisturizer with sunscreen and get your children and grandchildren in the habit, too. Be sure to follow these tips every day and have a wonderfully safe summer!

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Barbara Grassley is a member of the Congressional Families Cancer Prevention program of the Prevent Cancer Foundation and the spouse of U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley.