



QUESTIONS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ANSWERS

Skin Cancer

Who is at Risk for Skin Cancer?

Anyone who goes in to the sunlight without protection is at risk for skin cancer. One in every 5 people will get skin cancer later in life. Skin cancer is seen in people as young as the mid-teens. One bad sunburn can double the chance of getting skin cancer later in life. Sun damage to the skin is on-going. Just going outside to garden, walk or watch the children adds up.

People of any color can get a sunburn. However, people who are at greatest risk for skin cancer:

- are fair-skinned
- spend a lot of time outdoors
- sunbathe
- use tanning beds

There is no such thing as a healthy tan. Tanning beds use a type of ray called UVA. It makes the skin tan instead of burn. Over time it makes cancer cells in the skin grow faster.

Signs of Sun Damage to the Skin

- sunburn
- tan
- broken red lines (weakened blood vessels)
- blotchy skin
- brown spots, also called liver spots
- wrinkles

How to Prevent Skin Cancer

There are 3 ways to prevent skin cancer.

1. Stay out of the sun.
2. Cover up.
3. Use a sun block or sunscreen.

1. Stay out of direct sun between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. This is when the sun's rays are strongest. The rays that are the most damaging are called ultraviolet or UV rays for short. There are two kinds of rays, UVA and UVB.

UV rays can pass through clouds and water. You can get a sunburn even on a cloudy or cool day. How can you tell if you are likely to get a sunburn on a certain day? Look for the UV Index in the weather report on TV or in the newspaper. The UV Index is a daily reading of the amount of UV rays reaching the earth at noon. Noon is the peak time for the sun's strength. Index numbers go from **0 to 10+**. Zero means the least amount of rays are reaching the earth. Anything over 10 is a very high amount of rays.

2. Cover up.

- Wear clothes that are made of tight-woven cloth like cotton. Loosely woven cloth lets the UV rays in.
- Wear dark colors. Dark colors absorb more UV rays and keep them from getting to your skin.
- Wear loose fitting clothes. They allow an air barrier between the skin and the clothes.
- Keep clothes dry. Wet clothes give 1/3 less protection from UV rays.
- Wear a hat with a wide brim. It will protect your:
 - scalp
 - nose
 - ears
 - back of neck
- Each inch of brim lowers your risk by 10%.
- Wear sunglasses. UV rays can damage the eyes. Buy glasses that block out 99% of UV rays. Dark glasses do not always protect

your eyes. Look for a label on the glasses. It will tell how much protection they give.

3. **Use a sunblock or sunscreen.** These are the two kinds of sun protectors.

What is the difference between a **sunblock** and a **sunscreen**? A **sunscreen** absorbs UV rays and keeps them from going into the skin. A **sunblock** acts as a shield between your skin and UV rays. It makes the rays bounce off the skin. **Sunblocks give better protection**, but they have to be put on more often.

Sun Protection Factors or SPF for Short

You will see a number on the bottle of sun protector. This number tells you how long you can stay in the sun before you get burned. With **SPF 15**, you can stay in the sun **15 times longer than you can without it**. If you burn in 20 minutes **without** a sun protector, you are safe **15 times longer with it**. That would be **20 minutes x 15 SPF= 300 minutes**. SPF 15 would protect your skin for **5 hours** (300 minutes).

On days with a UV Index of 5 use an SPF 15 sun protector. Also, wear a hat. On days when the UV Index is **10 or more use a SPF 30 or greater and total cover-up**. Look for a sun protector that says **broad spectrum**. There are 2 kinds of rays that damage the skin. UVA rays tan the skin. UVB rays burn the skin. Both are harmful. **A broad spectrum lotion will protect you from both types of rays.**

How to Use Sunblocks and Sunscreens

- Put on the sunblock or sunscreen **30 minutes** before going out in the sun.
- Be sure it is waterproof and sweat proof.
- Be sure it is no more than two years old. There is a date on the bottle.
- Put it on all parts of the body not covered. Do not forget the:
 - lips, nose, tops of ears
 - cheeks, chin
 - back of knees, back of neck
 - top of feet
 - bare scalp

- Get someone to help if you cannot reach a spot.

Babies and the Sun

- Do not use sunblocks or sunscreens on babies under 6 months. They may be sensitive to things in these lotions.
- Keep babies covered up.
- Keep babies in the shade.

Medicines and Sunburn

Some medicines can increase the risk of getting a sunburn. These include medicines for:

- high blood pressure
- steady heart beat
- diabetes (but not insulin)
- some antibiotics
- diarrhea

Ask your doctor if your medicines put you at risk for sunburn. Using a sun protector will help.

Signs of Skin Cancer

Check your skin on a regular basis. You need to find cancers in the early stages. Treatment is most successful early on. Watch for signs of the three types of skin cancer, including:

- Basal cell: This is the most common type of skin cancer. It is a slow-growing bump. It may crust or bleed.
- Squamous cell: This type of cancer looks like red, scaly patches.
- Melanoma: This is the most dangerous type. It looks like a dark mole. The edges are ragged. The color is uneven.

Watch for moles. Look for changes in their:

- size
- shape
- color

Also watch for:

- any unusual growth
- changes in skin color

- sores that won't heal

How can I find a Doctor?

St. Vincent Charity Hospital has doctors who have special training in skin cancer. To contact one of our doctors call the:

Physician Referral Line at 1-800-223-8662

Visit our Web site at www.stvincentcharity.com

Our doctors serve with a deep respect for all. Their goal is to give the best care and education whether or not a person can pay.

St. Vincent Charity Hospital

2351 E. 22nd Street

Cleveland, Ohio 44115

216-861-6200

TTY: Ohio Relay 1-800-750-0750

St. Luke's Health Care Center

11201 Shaker Boulevard

Cleveland, Ohio 44104

216-721-6900

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