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Don't Get Burned: Tips for Keeping Your Skin Healthy This Summer

As the days get longer and we start to spend more time outside, it is important to remember to protect our skin from the summer sun. The sun's ultraviolet light (UV) rays can damage skin cells, which could lead to premature aging and skin cancer. Enjoy your outdoor activities but do so with skin safety in mind. What we do now will help protect us later.

In the United States, skin cancer statistics are alarming; one in five Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime. Skin cancer is the world's most common type of cancer, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. This type of cancer impacts all people, no matter their age, skin color, or gender. The estimated annual cost to treat skin cancer of all types is around 8 billion per year.

The American Academy of Dermatology defines skin cancer as the abnormal growth of skin cells, usually caused by UV exposure.

- Basal Cell Carcinoma is the most common type of skin cancer and often is found in people with fair skin. It usually develops after years of frequent contact or from tanning beds. It can appear anywhere on the body, but particularly on the head, face, neck, and arms.
- Squamous Cell Carcinoma is the second most common type of cancer. It can look like a firm red bump, a scaly patch, or a sore that will not heal. This type of cancer occurs in the ear, face, neck, arms, chest, and back.
- Melanoma may develop in a mole or as a dark spot; it tends to spread. It often has irregularly shaped borders and is asymmetrical. The color varies from tan, white, red, blue, black, or brown. Most are larger than the eraser of a pencil. They can also rapidly change size, shape, and color.

Early detection is the key to preventing the spread of skin cancer. Examine your skin monthly and be aware of any changes. Note any new, growing, or changing growth, spots on the skin, or a sore that doesn't heal. If you notice any of these conditions or anything else that doesn't seem normal, schedule a visit with your healthcare provider.

You can take everyday precautions to limit your risk of developing skin cancer. The following list will help you and your family stay safe.

- Everyone should use sunscreen daily. Choose a broad-spectrum, water-resistant 30 SPF sunscreen. Do not use a product with an expired date; it will not be effective in protecting your skin. Use enough product to cover all exposed skin. Apply sunscreen at least 15 minutes before sun exposure and reapply at least every 2 hours.
- Stay out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when its rays are strongest.
- Wear protective clothing and a wide brim hat with no holes in the fabric. Wear glasses and sunglasses with UV protection. You can develop melanoma in your eyes.
- Avoid tanning beds. The light from the tanning bed can also cause premature aging and skin cancer.

Remember that anyone can get skin cancer regardless of age, skin color, or gender. Protect your skin by making monthly skin checks and using proper precautions when out in the sun. Let your healthcare provider know if you see anything unusual.

Resource: *Protect Your Skin from the Sun, K-State Research and Extension, 2025 Annual Lesson Series*