

July is UV Awareness Month!

By Ashley J. Sicilia



It's the middle of July — you and your families are having a blast enjoying summer festivities from trips to the shore, camping, family barbeques, or just hanging pool-side. Summer is giving everyone just what we've all been wanting after a cool spring season — warmth and a great tan. Okay, we'll admit it. Sun-kissed skin looks good on you. But, researchers from the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston say, even the *slightest* exposure to UV that causes your skin to tan, puts you at risk for skin cancer (*Harvard Medical School*).

A suntan is actually the body's way of fending off UV radiation. In short, pigment forms to protect the nuclei in our cells, similar to the function of an umbrella. According to Dr. David Fisher, chief of the Department of Dermatology at Mass General, "It [the pigment] actually collects on the sun-facing side of the cell". Amazing! Although this is an adaptive response from our bodies to protect us from UV radiation, it is by *no* means absolute protection (*Harvard Medical School*).

There are benefits to sunlight, such as the sun's natural environmental light cues that allow us to maintain a healthy circadian rhythm, which benefits the body's sleep cycle, and mood as well as vitamin D production. Although there are varying arguments on whether or not exposing yourself to the sun is a healthy way of getting your daily dose of vitamin D, Dr. Fisher strongly believes that the risk of skin cancer greatly outweighs the benefit of sun exposure. Instead, he recommends the use of vitamin D supplements (*Harvard Medical School*). The Department of Health and Human Services along with the World Health Organization say that radiation from the sun is carcinogenic.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), skin cancer is the most common form of cancer, with melanoma being the most serious. It causes more than 75 percent of skin cancer deaths (United States EPA). Interestingly, when thinking about skin cancer regionally on the body, the majority of skin cancers in the U.S. are occurring on the left side or the driver's side of the body, per Dr. Susan T. Butler, coauthor of a study written in the *American Academy of Dermatology*. Also included in the study is the hypothesis that the increase in left-sided skin cancers may be a direct result from exposure to UV radiation when driving a car (*Skin Care Foundation*).

As you age, are you wondering why you're noticing more wrinkles to your skin along with a change in texture? We all know the sun damages your skin but 90% of visible changes in the skin are actually attributed to damage from the sun and *not* solely from aging. In fact, if proper measures are taken to protect our skin, most premature-aging can be avoided (*United States EPA*).

Did you know that UV radiation can also cause immunosuppression, the suppression of the body's natural immune system and its ability to fight infection? Research conducted by Professor and Scientist, Mary Noral, of the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, demonstrated that UV radiation downregulates immune responses. The process of how this occurs is a bit complicated, but in short, it [UV radiation] leads to the generation of regulatory cells, which is shown to affect microbial immunity, therefore affecting how our bodies react to infection, permanently (*Simpson*).

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Protecting yourself is a must. But, if you're using sunscreen, are you using it properly and most effectively? The American Academy of Dermatology Association recommends choosing a sunscreen classified as "broad spectrum". This ensures protection from both UVA and UVB radiation, both of which are carcinogenic. Use SPF 30 or higher. If you're going to wear make-up, put sunscreen on first. Choose a sunscreen that is water resistant and reapply every two hours (American Academy of Dermatology).

SPF is your friend. Using it is a way of keeping healthy. Take preventive action by applying it every day or seek shade rather than exposing yourself to harmful UV rays from the sun. **Protect your skin - don't get scorched!**

>> Tycor will hold monthly wellness challenges that will officially begin in August. As a "warm-up" in July, we are asking everyone to make a conscious effort to use SPF every day. We share these challenges with you in the hope that you will join us in our endeavor to "Live Well".

Works Cited

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