
HOW CAN I LOWER MY RISK OF SKIN CANCER?

The single most important thing you can do to lower your risk of skin cancer is to avoid direct sun exposure. Sunlight produces ultraviolet (UV) radiation that can directly damage the cells of our skin. People who work outdoors are at the highest risk of developing skin cancer. The sun's rays are the most powerful between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm, so be particularly careful during those hours. People who live in the southern U.S. are at higher risk, particularly in summer. Sunscreen products do not completely block the damaging rays, but they allow you to be in the sun longer without getting sunburn.

TIPS FOR LOWERING YOUR RISK OF SKIN CANCER

Some tips for lowering your risk of developing skin cancer include:

- Minimize the amount of time in direct sunlight.
- Wear hats with brims to protect your face and ears.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants to protect arms and legs (preferably clothing that has been rated for UV protection).
- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes.
- Use broad spectrum sunscreen with SPF of 30 or higher. Sunscreens with zinc and titanium are the best to block the sun's rays.
- Sunscreen should be applied before exposure and when the skin is dry.
- Sunscreen should be reapplied any time after going into water.
- Consider higher SPF such as 70 or 100 if prolonged exposure is expected or on sensitive areas of the body such as the face.
- Do NOT use tanning beds. There is no such thing as a "safe tan."

It is also critical to recognize early signs of skin trouble. The best time to do self-examination is after a shower in front of a full-length mirror. Note any moles, birthmarks, and blemishes. Be on the alert for sores that do not heal or new nodules on the skin. If you notice anything new or unusual, see your physician right away. If you have a strong family history of skin cancer, particularly melanoma, an annual examination by a physician skilled at diagnosing skin cancer is recommended.

Catching skin cancer early can save your life.

WHAT IS THE ULTRAVIOLET (UV) INDEX?

The UV index provides important information to help you plan your outdoor activities and avoid overexposure to the damaging rays of the sun. Developed by the National Weather Service and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the UV index is issued daily as a national service.

The UV index gives the next day's expected amount of exposure to UV rays. The index predicts UV levels on a 0 to 10+ scale (see chart below). Always take precautions against overexposure, and take special care when the UV index predicts exposure levels of moderate and above (5 to 10+).

Index Number: Exposure Level

- 1 - 2: Minimal
- 3 - 4: Low
- 5 - 6: Moderate
- 7 - 9: High
- 10+: Very High