

Summertime skin care can help prevent cancer

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As the summer outdoor season inches closer, so does the occurrence of sunburns and skin damage.

While out basking in the sun, skin cancer usually never comes to mind, but due to the recent increase in cases of skin cancer, skin care awareness should be a priority.

Skin cancer is a disease in which cancer cells form in skin tissue. The skin is the body's largest organ, increasing the possibility of the cancer. According to the National Cancer Institute, skin cancer can occur anywhere on the body, but it is most common in skin that has been exposed to sunlight, such as the face, neck, hands and arms.

Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer. It can be cured if caught and treated in the early stages, but in the more advanced stages it can spread through the blood or to other organs and bones. Melanoma is often caused by too much exposure to the sun and can be linked to family history. People who have a fair complexion, red hair, light skin and blue eyes are associated with a higher risk of contracting melanoma. Also, a patient who has previously had melanoma is

at risk of developing the cancer again. According to the MD Anderson Cancer Center, patients who have been treated for melanoma have at 7 percent risk of developing the cancer for a second time. This risk is 900 times higher than the general population.

According to the MD Anderson Cancer Center, 51,000 new cases of invasive melanoma are expected in the United States this year. In a shocking new trend, the cancer is now more dominant in young adults. Melanoma is the most common cancer in people ages 25 through 29.

Melanoma is one of three major types of skin cancer. Others include basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma. While basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas can cause illness, damage and disfigurement if untreated, both have a cure rate of more than 90 percent. Malignant melanoma, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, causes more than 75 percent of all deaths from skin cancer. This disease can spread to other organs, most commonly the liver and lungs. If diagnosed it can be cured, but if diagnosed at a late stage it is more likely to spread and cause death.

Melanoma is a tumor that origi-

nates in the cells that produce the pigment that colors skin, hair and eyes. This pigment is usually heavily concentrated on the skin in moles. There are four types of melanomas: superficial spreading melanoma, lentigo maligna, acral lentiginous melanoma and nodular melanoma.

According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, superficial spreading melanoma is the most common type of melanoma and accounts for about 70 percent of all cases. Superficial is most likely to occur on the trunk in men and the legs in women. Most melanomas that affect younger people are the superficial, spreading type.

Lentigo maligna is most often found in elderly people. It is often found on chronically sun-exposed areas such as the face, ears, arms and upper trunk. According to MD Anderson, lentigo is most commonly found on the faces of older Caucasian women and is rare in individuals younger than 50. It is the most common form of melanoma in Hawaii.

Acral lentiginous melanoma is often found on the soles of the feet or on the palms of the hands. This type of melanoma is more often found in dark-skinned people and is the most common melanoma in African-Americans and Asians.

Nodular melanoma is the most aggressive of the melanomas. It is found in 10 out of 15 cases and usually appears in the trunk, legs and arms of elderly people. Nodular melanomas are more aggressive and usually develop more rapidly.

Early detection is the best defense against melanoma. The sooner the cancer is detected and treated, the better the results. The first step in treatment is the removal of the melanoma. Removal is most commonly done by cutting it off. In most cases, removals can be done in the doctor's office under local anesthesia. If the melanoma is larger, it might require more extensive surgery.

There are many precautionary steps that can be taken to prevent skin cancer. When outside for long periods of time, it is best to stay in a shaded area, especially between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Apply one ounce (two tablespoons) of sunscreen to your entire body about 20 to 30 minutes before going outside. Sunscreen should be reapplied every two hours to avoid burning. Cover up with clothing when possible. Although most cases of skin cancer are treatable, skin cancer itself can be prevented.

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