

Study finds dramatic rise in skin cancer among middle-aged adults

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A new Mayo Clinic study found that among middle-aged men and women, 40 to 60 years old, the overall incidence of skin cancer increased nearly eightfold between 1970 and 2009, according to a study published in the January issue of *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*.

"The most striking finding was among women in that age group," says dermatologist Jerry Brewer, M.D., principal investigator of the study. "Women between 40 and 50 showed the highest rates of increase we've seen in any group so far."

There has been widespread concern in recent years about the rising incidence of [melanoma](#), which affects 75,000 Americans annually and results in nearly 9,000 deaths. Few studies, however, have investigated which age brackets of adults are most at risk.

Dr. Brewer's team conducted a population-based study using records from the Rochester Epidemiology Project, a collaboration between healthcare providers in southeastern Minnesota that allows researchers to study health and illnesses in the community. They found that among white, non-Hispanic adults in the 40 to 60 age group the incidence of skin cancer increased 4.5-fold among men and 24-fold among women.

In particular, women under 50 showed a marked increase in melanoma, a finding that may prompt future studies of a premenopausal hormonal connection to the disease. Even though women were more likely to develop melanoma, men were more likely to have deeper lesions.

Another significant finding was that the overall chances of surviving melanoma increased by 7 percent each year of the study. "The improved [survival rates](#) may be due to increased public awareness, more frequent screenings, and detection of skin cancer at earlier stages," says Dr. Brewer. "People have more access to dermatologists than before, and we have new tools, like dermoscopy [which includes the widely used ABCDE criteria], to view details of a mole and detect earlier melanomas."

The steepest increase in melanoma occurred in the last decade covered by the study, 2000 to 2009. The uptick, researchers speculate, may be connected to the popularization of tanning beds in the 1980s and 1990s.

"There's been a cultural trend for many decades in which people connect being tan with being fit and even successful," says Brewer. This trend could be one of the reasons, Dr. Brewer says, that melanoma has become so prevalent in the groups he has studied.

The current study follows on the heels of last year's findings, in which Dr. Brewer's team noted alarming rates of melanoma in young adults, ages 18 to 39. His group will continue to track the trend of melanoma and survival rates among adults over 60.

Skin cancer can be prevented. Dr. Brewer gives four simple ways to improve your chances of preventing skin cancer:

1. Avoid the use of tanning beds
2. Use sunscreen
3. Be familiar with your skin by performing frequent self-skin examinations
4. Check in with your dermatologist annually

These messages of prevention are important for people of all ages. Refer

to Mayo Clinic's cartoon-style PSA to help explain the importance of [skin cancer](#) prevention and being "sun smart" to kids or teens.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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