Have fun in the sun, but protect your skin, expert says

July 14 2024, by Carole Tanzer Miller

Roughly 20% of Americans are diagnosed with skin cancer at some
point in their lives, but it's not inevitable.

Skin cancer is not only the most common cancer, it's also the most preventable. Most of the time, too much sun exposure is to blame.

"When it comes to skin cancer, prevention is key," surgical oncologist Dr. Jeffrey Farma said in a news release. "My goal is to ensure patients can enjoy their lives, including time in the sun, while being mindful that even a small skin lesion can quickly escalate into a very serious issue."

Even if you don't burn easily, whether you're young or old, you can still get skin cancer, Farma emphasized.

Since 2011, rates of the most malignant skin cancer—melanoma—have risen roughly 7% a year, and skin cancer rates have held steady among young people.

"We have seen young patients in their 20s who tan a lot and use tanning salons and are unfortunately diagnosed with skin cancer. That diagnosis can completely change their life," said Farma, co-director of the Melanoma and Skin Cancer Program at Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia. He is also state chairman of the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer.

To protect yourself while enjoying time outdoors, Farma offers these tips:

- **Use sunscreen properly:** Wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30—even if you tend to tan and not burn. "You can get skin cancer with any skin pigmentation," Farma warned. Apply sunscreen during all seasons, even winter. Boating or skiing are particularly dangerous since reflection from water and snow may increase ultraviolet exposure. Remember: Be generous
when you apply sunscreen and reapply it to exposed body parts every two hours, especially if you're swimming or sweating a lot. Set a reminder on your phone so you don't forget. Wearing UV-protective clothing and hats offers another layer of protection.

- **Seek out credible information:** The widespread use of social media means misinformation spreads fast. "Some people think getting an initial tan or burn in the summer is healthy and provides protection against burns for the rest of the summer," Farma said. "That is still damaging and putting you at risk." Another troubling misconception: Online posts that link sunscreen to cancer, which Farma said is not based on credible study. For the most credible advice on preventing skin cancer, consult a dermatologist or your primary care doctor. They can also answer questions about different types of sunscreens and the protection they offer.

- **Watch for skin changes:** Early detection can prevent skin cancer from being more serious. Pay attention to any changes in your skin, even on areas like the palms of hands, soles of feet, under the nails, that are rarely exposed to the sun, Farma said. Alert your doctor quickly to areas of concern.

**More information:** Learn more about protecting yourself from skin cancer at the [American Cancer Society](https://www.cancer.org).

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