

Cover up! Don't soak up those sun rays

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(HealthDay)—Only half of Americans routinely protect themselves from the sun when outdoors, a recent American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) survey found.

Those who don't practice sun safety put themselves at increased risk for [skin cancer](#), which is the most [common cancer](#) in the United States, despite being one of the most preventable cancers.

One in 5 Americans will develop skin [cancer](#) at some point in their life, the AAD estimates. Just one serious sunburn in childhood or the teen years can nearly double a person's risk of developing melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, later in life.

Because May is Skin Cancer Awareness Month, the AAD is encouraging Americans to "practice safe sun."

"Exposure to the sun's harmful UV rays is the most preventable risk factor for skin cancer, and there are many simple things you can do to protect yourself from the sun," AAD President Dr. George Hruza said in an academy news release.

Seek shade when possible, especially between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when the sun's rays are strongest.

Wear [protective clothing](#), such as a lightweight, long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.

Apply a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher to all skin not covered by clothing. Reapply every two hours or after swimming or sweating.

"It's also important to remember to protect parts of your body you think might not be getting any sun," Hruza said.

"Areas like the tops of your hands, bottoms of your feet or the part in your hair may not immediately come to mind when it comes to sun protection, but they are still vulnerable to dangerous sun damage," he

explained.

Skin cancer is highly treatable when caught early, so it's important to do regular skin self-exams and look out for ABCDEs—the warning signs of melanoma:

- Asymmetry: One half of the spot is unlike the other half.
- Border: The spot has an irregular, scalloped or poorly defined border.
- Color: The spot has varying colors from one area to the next, such as shades of tan, brown or black, or areas of white, red or blue.
- Diameter: Melanomas are usually greater than 6 millimeters (about the size of a pencil eraser) when diagnosed, but they can be smaller.
- Evolving: The spot looks different from the rest or is changing in size, shape or color.

"If you find any new or suspicious spots on your skin, make an appointment to see a board-certified dermatologist," Hruza said. "Spots that are changing, itching or bleeding could be a sign of skin cancer, and the earlier [skin cancer](#) is detected, the easier it is to treat."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [skin cancer](#).

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