

Safety In The Sun

It is 93 million miles away, and life would not exist without it. Its energy moves the winds, permits life-giving rains to develop and fall, and is the engine behind plant growth, which supports the food chain and oxygen cycle. In ways beyond measure, we depend on this nearby star. Yet foolish exposure to sunlight can be harmful to human health. Following are some of the things to think about when you spend significant time outdoors.

1. Ultraviolet rays can damage the eye's sensitive retina and cornea. Long-term exposure can cause cataracts, which can lead to permanent blindness or other vision problems.
2. Skin cancer is usually related to overexposure to the sun. It is one of the most common forms of cancer in the U.S., and becoming more common. About 600,000 cases are diagnosed annually, and about 6,700 people die every year from melanoma, the most serious skin cancer.

Skin cancer is not associated with a single event, like painful sunburn, but is the product of long-term (and therefore "hidden") exposure. Protection from excessive exposure to the sun is simple, commonsense, and effective in avoiding later health problems. Be safety savvy and do the following:

- Wear protective clothing, including a hat and proper sunglasses. Remember that poor grade sunglasses are worse than none at all.
- Wear proper sunscreen (SPF rating of at least 15). But don't use these products as a crutch. Instead, limit your exposure to the sun, even if you are wearing the proper clothes and sunscreen.
- See your doctor if you notice a new growth, mole, or discoloration, or a sudden change in an existing mole. Detection of skin cancer is the first step for successful treatment.