Protect Yourself Against UV Rays



WHAT'S AT STAKE

Working outdoors with the heat of the sun blasting down on you may seem like a good time to wear as little as possible and get a good tan. But the reality is that excessive outdoor work without proper skin protection can cause deadly skin damage.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

There's no such thing as a safe suntan. The non-fatal consequences of ultraviolet (UV) exposure include prematurely aged skin, cataracts and other eye problems. The fatal consequences of too much exposure to UV rays include the most serious type of skin cancer, melanoma.

EXAMPLE

Recently, a 34-year Roads and Traffic Authority employee was granted an award from the Workers' Compensation Commission when he filed for damages to his skin after excessive sun exposure. He'd acquired multiple types of skin cancers, and has had several surgeries to remove them from his ears, abdomen, cheeks, back, arms, legs and neck.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

This is the profile of someone with an increased risk of skin cancer:

- Spends many hours outdoors;
- Has fair skin and light colored hair. Redheads and blondes are also more at risk than those with dark hair;
- Doesn't tan easily, but freckles or burns first; and
- Has many moles.

Protect yourself against the harmful effects of the sun by:

- Wearing clothing that doesn't let much visible light through to your skin;
- Using sunscreen with sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15, which blocks 93 percent of burning UV rays. SPF 30 blocks 97 percent;
- Wearing a wide-brim hat;
- Wearing sunglasses rated for blocking 99 or 100 percent of UV;
- Limiting your exposure to intense sunlight when the sun is higher in the sky.

It’s also a good idea to examine your body regularly or have your spouse keep an eye on it, because if you detect it early, skin cancer can almost always be cured.

The early warning sign is a spot on your skin that changes in size, color or shape over a period of one month to one or two years. You want to watch out for:

- A red scaly patch that is visibly outlined,
- A wax-like pale pearly knob, or
- A sore that doesn’t heal.

The most serious, melanoma, often begins as a small growth looking like a mole. If you find an unusual skin change, see a medical professional.

FINAL WORD

Remember, your exposure to UV rays depends on how strong the sunlight is, how long you’re exposed to it and whether your skin is protected. Consider whether that tan is worth the risk.