ASDS
American Society for Dermatologic Surgery

10 Skin Cancer Myths Debunked

1. ***I am not at risk to get skin cancer because my routine doesn't include any outdoor activities.***
   False. Dermatologists find that brief sun exposures throughout the year can add up to significant damage for people with fair skin. These brief moments can include driving with the sunroof open or walking around outdoor shopping centers during peak sun hours – between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. – which exposes your skin to damaging UV rays.[i] These cumulative, everyday exposures are linked to squamous cell cancer. Though not as dangerous as melanoma, squamous cell cancer is believed to cause up to 20 percent of skin cancer deaths.[ii]

2. ***A tanning bed is safer than UV rays from the sun.***
   False. Exposure to the ultraviolet light from tanning beds can impact the skin in a variety of ways – including wrinkles, sun spots or freckles. And for one in every five Americans, this exposure can lead to skin cancer. The use of tanning beds and sun lamps is hazardous because the UV radiation they deliver can damage your skin. Dermatologists highly recommend not using tanning beds and sun lamps. There is growing evidence they may increase your risk of developing melanoma.[iii] If you are seeking a tanned appearance, consider sunless tanning products.

3. ***People who tan easily and rarely burn will not get cancer.***
   False. There is no such thing as a healthy suntan. Any change in your natural skin color is a sign of skin damage. Evidence suggests tanning greatly increases your risk of developing skin cancer. The increase in skin pigment called melanin, which causes your skin to tan, is a sign of damage. Once skin is exposed to UV radiation, it increases the production of melanin in an attempt to protect the skin from further damage. The increase in melanin may cause your skin tone to darken over the next 48 hours.[iv]

   Every time your skin color changes after sun exposure, your risk of developing sun-related ailments increases.[v] The sun's rays, called ultraviolet A and ultraviolet B rays (UVA and UVB rays), damage your skin. This leads to early wrinkles, skin cancer and other skin problems. Over time, being in the sun often – even if you don't burn – can lead to skin cancer.[vi]

4. ***Dark-skinned men and women are not at risk for sun damage and skin cancer.***
   False. Though naturally dark people have a much lower risk of skin cancer than fair-toned people, this does not make them immune to skin cancer. Darker skinned men and women should still take action to protect their skin and eyes from overexposure to the sun as they can still develop malignancies and suffer all forms of UV damage.[vii] In addition, cases of skin cancer in people with darker skin are often not detected until later stages, when it is more dangerous.[viii]

5. *If you have a funny-looking or suspicious mole, your doctor can always cut it off before it turns cancerous.*

False. Sometimes what people may perceive as an annoying sore that won't go away – or a mole that has changed in size or color – is really something more serious and possibly an early form of skin cancer. Since only a physician can determine whether an area of the skin is cancerous, a visit to a dermatologic surgeon should be scheduled if any abnormal moles are discovered. An annual skin cancer screening is necessary to identify cancer in its early stages. The five-year survival rate for people whose melanoma is detected and treated before it spreads is almost 100 percent.[ix]

6. *You don't need to wear sunscreen on a cloudy day.*

False. It is a common myth that you can't get sunburned on a cloudy day; this is simply not the case. Even under cloud cover, it is possible for the sun to harm your skin and eyes and cause long-term damage. It is important that you protect yourself with sunscreen, even in cloudy weather.[x]

7. *SPF 30 is the all SPF protection you need; anything higher is all the same.*

False. There are three key points that debunk this common myth:

1. If you do not apply enough sunscreen (1 oz. for your body and 1 tablespoon for your face) or you apply your sunscreen incorrectly, it may result in a lower SPF than the labeled protection level. For instance, if you under-apply your SPF 30 sunscreen by half, you may only get the protection level of an SPF 15 or lower. In this case, higher SPF sunscreens can help compensate for the fact that people usually do not apply enough.
2. Higher SPF sunscreens provide additional sunburn protection under extreme UV conditions. When you participate in moderate outdoor activities such as joggling or are outside on a very hot day, the heat from your activity and surroundings can increase the sensitivity of your skin and higher SPF protection is needed in order to prevent acute sunburn.
3. UV damage accumulates over your lifetime. Using a high SPF sunscreen can reduce the accumulation of chronic UV damage that is linked to non-melanoma skin cancer and aging.

High SPF sunscreens used to be known as thick and greasy, but today's sunscreens have greatly improved and are even offered in spray forms so there is really no excuse to not to give yourself the added protection. Because the protection afforded by sunscreen begins to wear off after lengthy exposure to the sun and sunscreen rubs off with normal activity, it needs to be reapplied at least every two hours no matter what SPF level you are using.

8. *Teenagers and young people don't have to worry about skin cancer. It only affects older adults.*

False. Melanoma is the most common form of cancer in young adults, ages 25 to 29. It is also increasing faster in women ages 15 to 29 than in men in the same age group.[xi] You should check your skin monthly and be alert to changes in the number, size, shape or color of spots on your skin or sores that do not heal. Pay special attention to moles – especially moles that have recently changed, bleed or itch.

9. *Only UVB radiation can cause skin damage.*

False. Both UVA and UVB cause sunburns and damage skin, possibly leading to skin cancer. Look for a sunscreen that provides protection from both, called "broad-spectrum."

10. *I ski, snowboard and am outside a lot, but I don't need to wear sunscreen because it's winter.*

False. While it is true that the sun's intensity is lower during the winter, snow reflects the damaging rays of the sun, which can increase your chance of sunburn or damage to your skin.[xii]

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[i] American Cancer Society. *Sun and UV Exposure* http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancercauses/sunanduvexposure/skincancerpreventionandearlydetection/skin-cancer-prevention-and-early-detection-u-v-protection
[ii] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. *Counseling to Prevent Skin Cancer*. http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/3rduspstf/skcacoun/skcarr.htm
[iii] U.S. Food and Drug Administration. *Indoor Tanning: The Risks of Ultraviolet Rays*. http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm186687.htm
[iv] U.S. Food and Drug Administration. *The Risks of Tanning*. http://www.fda.gov/Radiation-EmittingProducts/RadiationEmittingProductsandProcedures/Tanning/ucm116432.htm
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[vi] Erie County, New York Department of Health. *Is a Suntan Worth Your Life?* http://www2.erie.gov/health/sites/www2.erie.gov.health/files/uploads/pdfs/suntan.pdf
[vii] U.S. Food and Drug Administration. *Your Skin*. http://www.fda.gov/Radiation-EmittingProducts/RadiationEmittingProductsandProcedures/Tanning/ucm116428.htm
[viii] Environmental Protection Agency. *Sunscreen: The Burning Facts*. http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/doc/sunscreen.pdf
[ix] American Cancer Society. *Skin Cancer Facts*. http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancercauses/sunanduvexposure/skin-cancer-facts
[x] U.S. Food and Drug Administration. *Ultraviolet (UV) Radiation*. http://www.fda.gov/Radiation-EmittingProducts/RadiationEmittingProductsandProcedures/Tanning/ucm116425.htm
[xi] Cancer Epidemiology in Older Adolescents & Young Adults. SEER AYA Monograph Pages 53-63. 2007.
[xii] U.S. Food and Drug Administration. *Sun Protection*. http://www.fda.gov/Radiation-EmittingProducts/RadiationEmittingProductsandProcedures/Tanning/ucm116445.htm