

Letter to the Editor – *Outside*
January 15, 2019

Dear Editor,

[“Is Sunscreen the New Margarine?”](#) discusses skin cancer, but unfortunately not accurately. Contrary to what the article says, sun exposure is the primary preventable cause of skin cancer. Moreover, vitamin D can easily be obtained through oral supplements without any need for patients to put themselves at risk for skin cancer through unnecessary sun exposure.

The article is very misleading when it asserts that vitamin D from sun exposure is better than oral vitamin D because those who get vitamin D from sun are healthier. Basically, this confuses association with causality. For instance, healthier people are more able to do outdoor activities – like biking, skiing and hiking – that lead to getting sun, and healthier people, by definition, are also less likely to get other diseases and die. Less healthy people exercise less, spend more time indoors, get less sun and are more likely to suffer from disease.

The article is wrong when it concludes that British and Australian experts don’t believe in sun protection. If you read carefully, one group says that it is acceptable to get a few minutes of sun in the winter when you are not near snow. Prolonged, unprotected exposure when the sun is intense, on the other hand, is universally accepted by dermatology societies to be dangerous.

Readers should also know that much of the “rogue” research purporting to show the so-called health benefits of ultraviolet light from sunlight or indoor tanning has been funded by the tanning bed industry.

Let’s talk facts. Skin cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in the U.S. While more people die of melanoma, even non-melanoma skin cancer – particularly cutaneous squamous cell carcinoma – kills thousands of Americans. Patients who don’t die still suffer. Millions experience a chronic disease that results in recurrent pain, anxiety, facial disfigurement, nerve injuries or damage to sensory organs like the lips, nose, ears and eyelids.

Skin cancers are more likely in patients with fair skin, family tendency to get skin cancer and history of sun exposure. While your readers cannot change the hue of their skin or their genetic heritage, they can certainly protect themselves from sun. Please encourage them to do so.



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