



A Note From Me Before the Summer

Spring has arrived in Rhode Island and our chance to get outside (and do all the outdoor things we love) is right around the corner, whether it's getting back in the garden, walking on the beach, or enjoying the outdoor activities that make this state such a great place to live. It's amazing how excited my patients get about their next chance to get back into sun...conversations even with me, the dermatologist! Now, I like getting outside just like the best of them—I spend hours gardening on the weekends (with sun protection, of course)—but to some people, spending time outside is only synonymous to getting a tan. The tan, even over enjoying the outdoors, becomes priority. And I wish I could say exposure to UV radiation was risk-free, but my bustling Mohs surgery practice (and the ill-woes of skin cancer) tell a much different story.

Dermatologists, like me, can sound like broken records: put on your sunscreen, stay out of the sun, don't go to the tanning beds. But, call the kettle black. As providers, we're seeing a strong uptick in all kinds of skin cancers that are directly related to sun exposure. And, even more concerning is the rapid increase in both melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers in the younger population, especially in females. In fact, melanoma is the most common form of cancer among young adults aged 25-29 years, and the second most common cancer in those aged 15-29 years. That's astounding when you realize that skin cancer is one of the preventable types of cancer.



Dr. Jason Michaels
MD, FAAD, Mohs Surgeon

PROTECT ALL THE SKIN YOU'RE IN

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Use a Layered Approach for Sun Protection.

- Sunscreen works best when used with shade or clothes, and it must be re-applied every 2 hours and after swimming, sweating, or toweling off.
- Use broad spectrum sunscreen with at least SPF 15 to protect exposed skin.
- Wear a hat, sunglasses, and protective clothing to shield skin.
- Seek shade, especially during midday hours.

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What is a tanning addiction?

Ultraviolet radiation, tanning beds, and the sun may have a secret grip on us that we're just beginning to understand. A number of studies over the last few decades show that tanning is a form of addiction for many patients; it's rooted in a physiological drive that just keeps us coming back for more.

Tanning addiction (tanorexia) is a physical and mental compulsion to darken the complexion of the skin. Sun exposure elicits an endorphin release and gives us a sensation of "euphoria," so researchers consider it to be a comparable behavior to substance related disorders, like alcohol or drugs, while others believe it to be a behavioral addiction, such as an obsessive compulsive disorder.



How many patients suffer from this?

It's estimated that 25% of beach-goers and 33% of frequent indoor tanners suffer from a tanning dependency. Annually, 30 million people in the United States tan indoors and, of those, around 2.3 million are teenagers, with one study finding that 35% of teenage girls have used tanning devices at some point in their lives. It's more of a problem of convincing people the effect the sun can have on their skin, both from a skin cancer and wrinkle standpoint. Really, I think people are generally catching on about sun protection, but it never ceases to amaze me how many people continue their sunbathing habits after having sustained several skin cancers in the past.

Why is it so hard to stop the habit?

Simply put, it makes us feel good and, understandably, people are more confident in presenting themselves to the world. But unfortunately, there are false promises imbedded in the messages people receive, such as the myths of safe tanning, harmless rays, no adverse effect, etc. Some tanning salons use deceptive advertising and false information to sell their products, from the amount of radiation emitted, to the level of operator knowledge, and even the degree these companies comply with state and federal guidelines. One study has shown that the UV output of some tanning devices emit as much as 4 times the amount of radiation as noon sunlight!

What are the consequences?

Skin cancer is our greatest concern as more people are diagnosed with skin cancer in the U.S. than all other cancers combined. Then, there are the significant wrinkles, photoaging, broken blood vessels, and leathery skin that comes with overexposure. So many people search for ways to look better and most regret their years in the sun. If you're ever wondering whether sun damage makes a difference in the way your skin looks, compare the skin on your bum with the skin on the back of your hand. Taking preventative measures earlier on go a long way to achieving glowier, healthier, and more youthful-looking skin.

What's a healthy amount of time in the sun?

Tanned skin always has the potential for becoming cancer so there's no defined "good amount" of time in the sun, but people also need their Vitamin D. While it's true that Vitamin D production can come from the sun, most people max their amount of Vitamin D within less than 15 minutes of sun exposure, so everything after is only sun damage. Instead, try drinking two glasses of milk a day. A piece of salmon, mackerel, cod liver oil, or daily supplements work, too. There are many options.

Are there any signs to determine when your skin is becoming damaged?

The simple answer is color change; in order for your skin to change colors, it (unfortunately) has to get damaged. Over time, this develops into broken blood vessels, brown sun spots, wrinkles, rough patches of precancers, and, eventually, skin cancer.



If I don't notice sun damage until my 30's, is it too late to correct?

Once damaged has been sustained, time alone won't correct the problems. There are multiple different and effective treatment options for sun damaged skin, including lasers for sun spots and broken blood vessels, skin tightening procedures, and lasers for wrinkle improvement. There are even devices to treat the active precancerous damage of the skin, as well as the irregular pigmentation that results from years of chronic exposure.

I'm a huge advocate of prevention and high quality skin care lines that both improve damaged skin and protect from the sun. A personalized treatment plan can always be put together at Aspire Dermatology to meet your needs.

What's the most important element that sun-worshippers and "tanorexics" should take away from this story?

1) Skin Cancer and 2) Premature Aging.

Over 3 million cases of non-melanoma skin cancer will be diagnosed this year, with another 100,000 cases of melanoma. I can promise that if you get melanoma, it'll change your life. Premature aging can be improved, but staying out of the sun is most important. Aspire Dermatology can help improve the many signs of chronic sun damage, but it's imperative to understand that UV radiation can create skin cancers that kill. And simply limiting this exposure will greatly reduce your risks of developing skin cancer in the future.

For more information, follow us on Social Media or visit our Website



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We would like to thank all of our staff for their continued dedication to our patients and the communities in which we all live and work

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