

Skin Cancer Facts vs. Fiction

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A summer tan looks healthy, and skin cancer isn't *that* serious, right? Don't fool yourself.

Knowing some skin cancer facts and protecting yourself from the sun can greatly reduce your chances of developing this potentially life-threatening disease.

What do I need to know about skin cancer?

Fiction: Skin cancer isn't very dangerous.

Truth: More than 5 million skin cancer cases are diagnosed every year. This year, an estimated 7,180 people in the U.S. will die from melanoma, the most aggressive type of skin cancer. Other skin cancers can also be deadly.

Fiction: If I don't get sunburned, I'll be safe.

Truth: There is no such thing as a safe tan acquired from sun exposure, according to Jennifer Tang, M.D., a dermatology expert with Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center and the University of Miami Health System. "What many refer to as a 'healthy glow' or 'base tan' is actually cellular damage caused by the sun's UV rays." The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warn that every time you tan, you raise your risk of getting melanoma.

Fiction: I'm safe from skin cancer because I apply sunscreen when I arrive at the beach, pool or park.

Truth: Broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) should be worn every day—not

just during outdoor activities, says Dr. Tang. Your skin is exposed to the sun's cancer-causing UV rays while you walk from one building to another, drive in the sun or sit near a window between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun is most intense.

To be effective, sunscreen must be reapplied every two hours and after periods of sweating and swimming/soaking. If you are wearing a face mask and sunscreen wipes off on the inside of the mask, it won't be effective. So, reapply sunscreen, and replace your face mask, as needed.

Fiction: My skin is naturally tan or dark, so I won't get skin cancer.

Truth: This misconception has contributed to a 20% increase in skin cancer among Hispanics and Latinos over the last two decades. When these populations get skin cancer, it's more likely to be diagnosed at later stages, when it's harder to treat. Blacks often develop deadly melanomas on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, and under the nails more often than whites. In addition, some whites with dark eyes and dark hair have a certain gene mutation that increases their risk for developing melanoma.

Fiction: I use tanning beds because they're safer than the sun.

Truth: Indoor tanning exposes you to radiation levels close to, or even stronger than, the sun. UV radiation from indoor tanning devices is actually classified as a human carcinogen, which means the world's leading health organizations have determined it may cause cancer. Using a tanning bed even once can increase your risk of developing melanoma by 20%, squamous cell carcinoma by 67%, and basal cell carcinoma by 29%.

Fiction: I see a dermatologist once a year, so I don't need to check

my own skin.

Truth: Examining your skin from head to toe every month (in addition to your annual professional skin check) will increase your chances of catching the early signs of melanoma when it's most treatable. In fact, it's more likely that you would first notice a new melanoma growing on your body before your doctor has a chance to spot it. If you find a new, growing or unusual-looking spot on your skin, see your dermatologist.

Fiction: Skin cancer is easy to spot because it looks like a large, black mole.

Truth: Early skin cancers may look the same as benign (non-cancerous) moles or spots, or they can have an unusual color, texture, size, elevation or sensation. [Click here](#) to learn how to effectively check your own skin. If you have any concerns about what you find, visit your dermatologist.

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