

Protecting skin from sun's rays today prevents cancerous growths in future



NURSE MURF

By HELEN MURPHY

YOUR body's largest organ — skin — also has the longest memory; it remembers every sunburn from your past, making it the most common site for cancer.

One in five Americans develops some type of skin cancer; there's about 1 million new cases each year. The risk of developing the most dangerous form, melanoma, is one in 33, making it the sixth most-common cancer.

The ABCs of skin cancer

Actinic keratoses, or AKs, are precancerous skin lesions. If left untreated, they can progress to a skin cancer, squamous carcinoma. AKs are a quarter to an inch wide and are scaling, peeling, and thickened white or yellowish patches of skin. They are most commonly found in fair-skinned people on the face, lips, back of the hands, forearms or the top of a balding head.

Basal cell carcinomas originate from the lowest or basal layer of the skin and are the most common form of skin cancer. The most classic form is a hard, pearly growth with rolled up edges and

Key Points

- One in five Americans develop some type of skin cancer.
- Choose sunscreen with at least an SPF of 15 with avobenzene and oxybenzone.
- Check for suspicious lesions each year on your birthday.

a central indentation that may be pigmented or have blood vessels. Other forms are an open sore that does not heal, a flat reddish patch, or a hard white or yellowish area that looks like a scar. They are slow growing, reach up to a half inch wide, and appear on the head, neck or hands. Occasionally, the flat types are found on the trunk. They rarely metastasize or spread to other parts of the body.

Squamous carcinomas originate from the upper (squamous) layer of the skin. They are found on sun-exposed parts of the body, but also in the mouth, on the lips or on the genitals. These also can be a non-healing growth or ulcer, look like a wart, or appear as red scaling bumps and patches. If left untreated, they can metastasize and be fatal. The good news is that, if caught early and surgically removed, 95% won't come back.

Melanomas are the most dangerous kind of skin cancer and one you need to be able to detect early, because if left

untreated, they can spread and be fatal. Knowing what they look like is as easy as A-B-C-D:

■ **Asymmetry.** If you were to fold the shape in half, the two sides would not match each other.

■ **Border irregularity.** If the outer edges of a lesion are notched, blurred or ragged, it may be a melanoma.

■ **Color.** Does it have more than one color? Most moles have a uniform color, not melanomas.

■ **Diameter.** Is it larger than the eraser end of a pencil? Moles stay the same size, but melanomas grow.

Prevention consists of avoiding the two major ultraviolet wavelengths that get through our ozone layer to deeply penetrate the skin — UVA — and cause sunburn — UVB.

Use a sunscreen with at least an SPF of 15 that has avobenzene to prevent burns with the addition of oxybenzone, which provides stability and blocks deeper UVA penetration. As the sun experts in Australia say, "slop" it on daily in an amount equal to a shot glass.

In addition to sunscreen, the American Academy of Dermatology recommends these following rules:

■ Wear long-sleeved shirts, pants, a wide-brimmed hat and dark glasses.

■ Seek shade during the sunniest part of the day (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.).

■ Avoid deliberate tanning.

■ Get your vitamin D from your diet.
■ Use caution around water, sun and sand, which reflect the sun's dangerous UV waves.

■ Protect children with sunscreen.
■ Every birthday, in your birthday suit, check for suspicious lesions.

For more information on skin cancer visit www.skincarespecialists.com/skin_cancer/index.html.

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Oregon faces summer water shortages

THE availability of water for irrigation this summer will be a challenge for some farmers and ranchers as a below-average winter snowpack has left many areas of Oregon — especially east of the Cascades — a bit on the short side. Perhaps a greater concern is the carry-over effect into 2008 and the need for a good wet winter with heavy mountain snowfall this upcoming year.

"Our water year started out fairly well with heavy rain in November and some early winter snow in the moun-

tain," says Jim Johnson, land use and water planning coordinator for the Oregon Department of Agriculture. "But the water situation has ended up problematic for parts of the state, especially for those who depend on irrigation. We are already hearing concerns in north-east and southeast Oregon."

Most of the indicators used to forecast summer water availability are below average this year, including precipitation. The much-needed winter accumulation of snow in the higher elevations never

built up to desirable levels. By the first of May, statewide snowpack was only about 61% of normal. Another problem was the early and rapid melting of that snowpack. Many basins in the state lost their snowpack at all but the highest elevations. While that replenished most of Oregon's 27 major irrigation reservoirs around the state, those reservoirs are expected to be drawn down early and often this summer. A slow, steady snow melt is preferred in a state that depends on summer irrigation.



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