Soaking Up The Rays Isn’t Such a Good Idea

Safety Talk

A person may work hard at an outdoor job and be proud of his muscular physique. To keep his body as tanned as possible, he might wear as little as possible whenever the sun is out. He could be on the beach on the weekend.

Trouble is, this worker might not realize that even young healthy skin can get cancer by too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays. Most of the damaging UV radiation we get comes from sunlight.

There’s no such thing as a safe suntan, experts say. There are no safe UV rays. Skin and eyes are the parts of us most likely to be damaged by UV.

The number of new cases of skin cancer in the United States are going up fast, and so is the number of deaths caused by the most serious form of skin cancer.

Melanoma is the worst type of skin cancer, and causes more than 75 percent of skin cancer deaths.

A flag person who also wants the bronzed look might not have considered the fact that so much sun exposure can prematurely age her skin and bring wrinkles, cataracts and other eye problems as well as the risk of cancer. And she might have certain characteristics that increase risk of skin cancer.

This is the profile of someone with an increased risk of skin cancer:

- Spends many hours outdoors.
- Has fair skin and light colored hair. (Redheads and blondes are also more at risk than dark-haired people).
- Doesn’t tan readily; freckles or burns first.

- Has many moles.

Outdoor workers can take steps to protect against UV radiation and skin cancer:

- Wear clothing that doesn’t let much visible light through to your skin.
- Use sunscreen with sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. This blocks 93 percent of burning UV rays; SPF 30 blocks 97 percent.
- Wear a wide-brim hat.
- Wear sunglasses rated for blocking 99 or 100 percent of UV.
- Limit your exposure to intense sunlight – when the sun is higher in the sky.

Examine your body regularly or have your spouse keep an eye on it, because if you detect it early, skin cancer can almost always be cured.

The early-warning sign is a spot on your skin that changes in size, color or shape over a period of one month to one or two years. Basal cell and squamous cell are the names of the most common skin cancers. They often look like a red scaly visibly outlined patch; or a wax-like pale pearly knob; or a sore that doesn’t heal. The most serious, melanoma, often begins as a small growth looking like a mole. If you find an unusual skin change, see a medical professional.

Remember, your exposure to UV depends on how strong the sunlight is, how long you’re exposed to it, and whether your skin is protected. Consider whether that dark suntan is worth the risk