

Summer...Sun...Skin...

Don't we all wait for those long, warm summer days, full of sun and fun?

After several months of not-so-friendly winter Chicago weather, majority of us have some form of vitamin D insufficiency due to lack of sun exposure. Vitamin D is a significant factor in our health condition and lack of it can affect our bones, moods, and even heart. Low levels of vitamin D can and should be supplemented by taking multivitamins but natural production of it is the best form of gaining its level back to normal range. And natural production of vitamin D occurs when we allow sunlight to convert some forms of skin cells into the vitamin D3, and further to vitamin D. The process is quite complicated but human bodies receive over 90% of vitamin D as a result of that process.

I am sure your question will be: how about sun and skin cancer? Yes, we know that sun exposure increases our risk to skin cancer and we should protect our largest organ from too much of sunlight. So how much is too much?

First of all, the best time for sun baths is before 10 am and after 4 pm. During the peak, 11-3, the sun produces the strongest UVB rays and its activity is at maximum level. Secondly, we should not allow for more than 20-30 minutes exposure and we should cover the most 'risky' parts of the body, like scalp and face. And finally, we should use a well-selected sunscreen.

Sun can be a healthy factor for our skin conditions; it helps with psoriasis and many forms of dermatitis. However, it needs to be used with moderation and caution. We should avoid sunburns and long-term exposures. If sunburns happen, we should allow for frequent cool showers and moisturizing with aloe-based products.

Individuals with a history of unlimited sun exposure or family history of skin cancer should see their dermatologist more frequently for general skin checks. Annual exams are usually recommended if there was no previous skin cancer identified. Individuals with personal history of skin cancer should see a



doctor at least twice a year.

General skin exams are quite simple to conduct and usually do not require any special testing unless suspicious forms of lesions or moles are found. Then, your doctor will perform a biopsy of that lesion and, within several days, you will receive a pathology result. Many forms of sun damage do not require surgeries and can be treated with cryotherapy (freezing) or topical medication. Sun damage that turned into a form of a skin cancer diagnosed through a biopsy will be treated with a total excision of the lesion. The sooner the cancerous lesion is identified, the chance for a smaller size of excision is possible. Your doctor will make sure all cancerous cells were eliminated. In some case, Mohs surgery is performed. Its goal is to minimize the extend of the removed skin tissue but assuring that all cancer is eliminated.

Skin cancer and sun damaged skin are a very frequently researched conditions. Especially, in individuals who are 60 years or older and who enjoyed a lot of sun in years that we did not recognized its damaging factor. There are many options of how to prevent sun damaged skin to develop skin cancer.

To learn more about sun damage and skin cancer research, call us at 847 392 5440. And please, enjoy the summer and sun, in moderation.

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