1 in 2 Americans Don’t “Practice Safe Sun”

The American Academy of Dermatology is marking Skin Cancer Awareness Month by asking, “Do you use protection?”

May 23, 2019 By Benjamin Ryan

To mark Skin Cancer Awareness Month, the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) is posing the question “Do you use protection?” Sun protection that is. Because according to a recent survey the academy conducted, half of all Americans don’t always protect themselves against the sun’s damaging rays when they go outside.

Skin cancer is not only the most common malignancy in the United States—an estimated one in five people are projected to develop it during their lifetime—it’s also one of the most preventable.

All it takes is one blistering sunburn during childhood or adolescence to double the risk of melanoma, the deadliest type of skin cancer, later in life.

“Nearly 20 Americans die from melanoma every day,” board-certified dermatologist George J. Hruza, MD, MBA, president of the AAD, said in a press release. “There are many simple things you can do to protect yourself from the sun.”

Hruza’s tips include:

- Take to the shade. Note that the sun’s rays are the most powerful between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.
- Cover up. Wear clothing that shields as much of your skin as possible as well as a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.
- Sunscreen. For all exposed skin, use a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen that has an SPF of at least 30. Give yourself another coat every two hours that you spend in the sun or after you go swimming or sweat considerably. Don’t forget the tops of your hands, bottoms of your feet and the part in your hair.

When detected early, skin cancer is highly treatable. You can check yourself for potential signs of such cancer by scanning your skin routinely and looking for spots or moles that follow the ABCDE

formula, designed to help identify warning signs of melanoma:

- Asymmetry: It is misshapen and not symmetrical.
- Border: It has a border that is irregular, scalloped or is not clearly defined.
- Color: The colors vary, including such shades as tan, brown or black. Or the spot may have areas of white, red or blue.
- Diameter: Typically, melanomas have a diameter of at least 6 millimeters, which is about the width of a pencil eraser. During their earlier stages, such cancers may be smaller.
- Evolving: Over time, it changes in size, shape or color or looks distinct from other spots on the body.

If you see any marks that fit this bill, you should see a dermatologist.

To read a press release about the study, click here.

To read Chelsea Dawson's personal cautionary tale about melanoma, click here.

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