

Healthwise. SVUH

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SKIN FOR LIFE by Sheila Ryan, Dermatology Nurse Specialist

Skin cancer is the most common cancer found worldwide amongst fair skinned populations. In the 19th century pale skin and long hemlines was the pinnacle of Victorian fashion. In the 20th Century hemlines got much shorter and tanned models became symbols of wealth and freedom. A tan was now much sought after even if you needed to suffer to get it... no-one ever said being fashionable was easy!

As sun-worshipping behaviour increased amongst fair skinned populations so too did the incidence of skin cancer. This was first seen in Australia. There was a steady increase in skin cancer until the sun awareness and skin cancer message got through to the general population. Unfortunately many individuals had died before this message was taken seriously. Interestingly today, Australia is the only country where the incidence of skin cancer has fallen. Therefore it is within our power to reverse the incidence of skin cancer by taking a few simple precautions.

THERE ARE TWO MAIN STRATEGIES TO SKIN CANCER PREVENTION:

1. Sun protection: Sun protection involves protecting your skin while in the sun. Skin protection is important in preventing photo-damage and minimising the risk of developing skin cancer. It is especially important that children's skin is protected. Burning in childhood dramatically increases the risk of skin cancer in later life. In addition early education of children in protecting their skin provides lifelong protection skills.

2. Skin surveillance: This involves checking your skin at regular intervals. Individuals who have greater than 20 moles or who have a history of skin cancer are at a greater risk and should be particularly vigilant about checking their skin for any changes.



HOW DO YOU PROTECT YOUR SKIN?

CLOTHING offers the best method to protect the skin. Cotton clothing with a tight weave is particularly good. For example short sleeved t-shirts with collars will protect the neck and shoulders. Hats will protect the scalp; wide brimmed hats will provide additional protection to the face and ears.

Exposed skin should be covered with a **SUNSCREEN**. Choosing a sunscreen that will give enough protection can be confusing. To guide you in your choice you should consider the following. Sunscreens should protect against both UVB and UVA.



UVB is the wavelength that causes sunburn. Most sunscreens will offer protection against UVB and the protection is expressed as the SPF (sun protection factor) number. The SPF number indicates how much extra protection the cream will offer. For example a SPF of 10 will offer 10 times normal extra protection against UVB. Though this may seem reassuring the SPF strength is based on laboratory testing which presumes that the individual will apply a thick layer of cream on the skin and will repeat that in 2 hours. Since there is a huge difference between laboratory conditions and reality, it is advisable to use a sunscreen with a high SPF. A SPF of 15 or more is generally recommended for adults and a SPF of 20 or more for children.

UVA is the wavelength that causes a tan and also causes the long term photo-damage and skin ageing. The quality of UVA protection that is offered by a sunscreen is often not stated as it is difficult to quantify. Where it is stated it may be expressed by a star system or in words. A UVA rating of high and above or a 4 star or more will provide appropriate protection against UVA. However sunscreens that state that they will allow the skin to tan without burning or that need a once only application should be suspected as having a low or nonexistent protection against UVA.

Sunscreens should be applied thickly to the skin to provide adequate protection. Particular attention should be given to the ears and neck. They should be re-applied every 2 hours especially when swimming or in hot weather where skin perspiration is higher. In Ireland sun protection measures should be taken between the months of April to September regardless of whether the sun is visible.



WHAT SHOULD YOU BE LOOKING FOR WHEN YOU ARE CHECKING YOUR SKIN?

Checking your skin is important for the early detection of skin cancer. Once a month it is advisable that you check your skin for any signs of change. It is important to look at all your skin so a mirror is an essential tool for examination of those difficult to see areas such as the back, buttocks and back of ears. Individuals who have multiple moles (50 or more) should consider having photographs taken of their skin which can then be used as a reference when examining the skin for any changes.

The ABCD guidelines are universally used to guide individuals as to the key changes in moles and freckles which may indicate the development of melanoma (most serious form of skin cancer). They are:

A - Asymmetry. Any change in the symmetry of a mole should be checked. They should be symmetrical where one half is like the other.

B – Border irregularity. The borders should be regular. Where the border becomes irregular or unclear this should be checked.

C – Colour change. Any change in the colour variety with the mole or colour differences between moles should also be examined further.

D – Diameter. This refers to changes in the size of the mole. If the mole is getting bigger it should be checked. Moles that are larger than 6mm are particularly suspect.

If in doubt, consult your GP. If s/he is concerned they will refer you to a Consultant Dermatologist.

Individuals over 40 should also examine themselves for non-melanoma skin cancers and pre-cancerous lesions. These will often appear initially as discreet red lesions. Depending on the cause, these may become rough and crusted, develop a translucent pearly surface, ulcerate, or become nodular (lump underneath the skin). The most typical sites for development of non melanoma skin cancers and pre-cancerous lesions are the face, scalp and hands. The full spectrum of clinical presentations of these types of skin cancer is not within the scope of this article. Further information is available through the Irish Cancer Society, www.cancer.ie or through The British Association of Dermatologists website.

www.bad.org.uk.

For a number of people swimming is a skill they would love to have. Many local pools offer lessons catering to every age and ability level. A lifesaving skill is very beneficial to hold. Details of courses and safe places to swim can be obtained at www.iws.ie

STAY SAFE IN WATER

When holidaying it is most people's top priority to relax and forget their worries. However there are certain situations during holidays that require vigilance, in particular in and around water. In 2007 there were 54 accidental drowning incidents in Ireland according to Irish Water Safety.

1. On arrival at a holiday centre, which has a swimming pool, do not allow children to go immediately to the swimming pool. Check out the safety arrangements first. On many occasions there may not be any lifeguard on duty.



2. Check for pool depth markings. There may not be any so you must check the depths yourself if you are a competent swimmer.

3. Be particularly careful of young children wandering off.

4. Ensure that you do not dive into shallow water.

5. Watch out for sudden drops or changes in the gradient of a pool floor.

6. Obey all the usual safety rules that apply in any properly run pool e.g. no running, no running dives, no horseplay etc.

7. It is unwise to go for a quick swim after a lengthy car journey.

8. Never swim after consuming alcohol or food.

9. Check for missing, uneven or slippery tiles surrounding or in the pool.

10. Do not swim or do not allow children to swim in a pool with discoloured water.

11. Always swim, or surf, in areas patrolled by lifeguards.

12. Swim in the designated swimming area when swimming in the sea. Normally, the red and yellow flags indicate the zoned area for swimming.

13. Swim with family or friends - never alone.

14. Swim within your depth and parallel to the shore.

By Irish Water Safety

GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR MEDICINES

by Caitriona O'Reilly, Pharmacy Technician

You are the most important person when it comes to getting the best from your medicines. Your doctor or pharmacist has decided what medicine is most suitable for you, having discussed your condition with you. Whatever medicine you are on, whether it's a tablet for hay fever or something you take every day for your heart, it is up to you to use it correctly.

General tips for taking medicines

1. Know your medicine.

Know as much as possible about the medicines you are taking. Remember, understanding what it is all about is one way of being in control. Make sure you understood what the doctor or pharmacist told you. If you are not sure, don't be afraid to ask again.



2. Before taking your medicine.

Before taking your medicine always read the label on your medicine and the leaflet provided – here you will find lots of useful information about how to use the medicine, its side effects, what to do if you miss a dose, etc.

3. Know what your medicine is for.

You should know the following about your medicines before you start taking them:

- Know the name of the medicine prescribed.
- Know what it is for.

4. Always finish your medication.

Finish all your medicines unless your doctor tells you not to. This is particularly important for medicines like antibiotics where you must take the full quantity even if you are feeling better. Do not 'save' left over antibiotics for the next time you, your child, or any other family member is sick. With many medicines for chronic or continuous conditions you must take them every day even if you feel well.



5. Some medications may react with others.

If your doctor prescribes a new medicine, find out if you should stop taking any medicines that you are already on, or if the medicine is likely to affect any others that you are taking (including any non-prescription medicines, herbal or homeopathic remedies or any other complimentary medicines). Remember alternative therapies such as herbal medicines may interact with medicines prescribed for you by your doctor. It is important to check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking complimentary medicines, to check are they safe or will they alter the effects of medicines that you may be taking.

6. Some food/drinks react with some medicines.

Be aware that some foods/drinks interact with medicines, and may change the way they work. There may be some specific directions on the label e.g. some medicines need to be taken either with or without food. Alcohol when taken with some medications, for example, may make you drowsy or cause other side effects.

7. Do you need to see your doctor again?

It is important to know if the doctor needs to see you again and if so when, and how long you should take the medicine for.

8. Travelling away from home.

If you are going away from home, make sure you carry enough of your medicine with you to take the proper dose while you're away. Take extra in case you are away longer than expected. Always make sure you have enough medication in hand luggage when flying.



9. Are you having side effects?

If your medicines don't seem to be working or you think you are getting side effects, do not stop taking the medication without first checking with your doctor or pharmacist. If you think you may be having a serious side effect contact your doctor or pharmacist immediately.

PHARMACY DEPARTMENT SVUH

The pharmacy department in St. Vincent's University Hospital is open 8.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday. Staff prescriptions left in the pharmacy post box before 11.30am, may be collected after 3.30pm.

HOW MUCH WOULD YOU SAVE IF YOU QUIT?

10 a day Smoker

In a year of not smoking you will have saved:

€1,485



Waste disposal costs for a year (€340)

+



TV licence for a year (€170)

+



Car tax for a year (€350)



€20 monthly call credit for a year (€240)

+



€385 towards food shopping per year.

= €1,485

The amount of cigarettes you will have chosen not to smoke is:

3665

20 a Day Smoker

In a year of not smoking you will have saved:

€2,970



Waste disposal costs for a year (€340)

+



TV licence for a year (€170)

+



Car tax and Insurance covered for a year (€950)



€20 monthly call credit for a year (€240)

+



€400 towards food shopping per year

+



Long weekend for two in Paris, flights and accommodation included with €145 spending money (€870)

= €2,970

The amount of cigarettes you will have chosen not to smoke is:

7,331

Compiled by Deborah Maher and Aoife Egan, Dept Preventive Medicine & Health Promotion

SMOKE-FREE CAMPUS POLICY

January 1st saw the introduction of the Smoke Free Policy in SVUH. Thanks to all who worked so hard on this policy. Many staff members who smoke prepared for the change in policy by seeking support from the Smoking Advice Service and using Nicotine Replacement Therapy such as a nicotine patch.

Many have reported that this has helped them and the transition has not been as difficult as they had anticipated it might have been. Liz Tuohy reports that she was a bit nervous prior to talking to the Smoking Advice Officer. She then realised, when she thought about it that she had managed to take many flights, even some long haul ones, and hadn't a problem with not smoking. Each day when she's coming to work, she imagines a holiday destination and this keeps her motivated during the day. She finds the nicotine patch has really helped her and she is not having difficulty with the policy. She can't believe it has been so easy and is delighted to be 'saved' from having to go outside in the cold weather.

If you would like advice on how you may manage your smoking while at work, please contact the Smoking Advice Service on ext 4958.

SMOKING ADVICE SERVICE

For patients, staff and the general public

Help Available

- Individual consultations for hospital patients and staff
- Six-week stop-smoking courses for everyone

For further information, contact
Department of Preventive Medicine
& Health Promotion
St. Vincent's University Hospital
Elm Park, Dublin 4
Telephone: 221 4958

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS HEALTHWISE JUNE 2009: Contributions for next issue of Healthwise should be sent to Irene Gilroy, Health Promotion at i.gilroy@svuh.ie by 1st May 2009.