

Ask *the* Expert

Skin Cancer and Tanning

Because your skin covers your entire body, it is the largest organ of the human body. It is important to protect the outward appearance of your skin, in addition to the health of your skin.

Exposure to UV rays through the sun or artificial sources (tanning beds) can lead to skin cancer in addition to wrinkles and premature aging.

Skin cancer is the leading cancer in both men and women. Skin cancer is preventable with the use of sun protecting measures such as sunscreen and sun protective clothing.

How can I prevent skin cancer?

Your risk of developing skin cancer increases if you do not protect your skin. The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) estimates that 1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer throughout their lifetime. How can we fight skin cancer? It starts with prevention.

The AAD has several recommendations for prevention. The best prevention method is following the recommended guidelines for reducing sun exposure.

These guidelines include

- seeking shade at times when the sun rays are at their strongest (10 am – 2 pm)
- wearing protective clothing
- wearing a broad-spectrum, water resistant sunscreen of 30 SPF or higher every day of the year
- frequent re-application of sunscreen when outdoors, particularly in the water
- avoiding the tanning bed

How do I know if I have skin cancer?

The next step in prevention is detection. It is important to perform self-checks of your skin for any changes or areas that may appear suspicious. The American Academy of Dermatology offers a printable body map to aid in documenting the moles on your skin.

Education is an important part of performing self-

examinations of your skin, including knowing the signs of a cancerous or pre-cancerous mole. It is a good idea to schedule an annual visit with a dermatologist for a check-up.

Should you discover a suspicious spot on your skin, schedule an appointment with your dermatologist as soon as possible. Early detection is vital for the best course of treatment.

The American Academy of Dermatology also offers numerous resources for educating yourself about moles – including images of the ABCDE's (Asymmetry, Border, Color, Diameter, and Evolving).

Are tanning beds linked to skin cancer?

According to the AAD, The World Health Organization has declared indoor tanning devices to be cancer-causing agents that are in the same category as tobacco.

Studies have found a 59% increase in the risk of melanoma in those who have been exposed to UV radiation from indoor tanning.

In addition to the risk of skin cancer, excessive

exposure to UV radiation during indoor tanning can lead to premature skin aging, immune suppression, and eye damage, including cataracts and ocular melanoma.

The instant gratification of tan skin may be appealing, but the consequences for your skin and health are not. I recommend following the recommendations of the American Academy of Dermatology and avoiding damage to your skin through tanning beds and unprotected/prolonged sun exposure.

You can avoid this damage to your skin and get the same tanned look by using self-tanning products. Self-tanners have improved over the years and they have much better coloring than the previous orange skin look. These products can give you the same tanned skin look without the harmful effects of UV rays.

Don't forget to call to schedule your annual skin wellness exam and to discuss the best course of care for your skin with a dermatologist.

Dr. Ledet is accepting new patients. Call 936-8000 for an appointment.



Johnathan J. Ledet, MD
Dermatology

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