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Skin Cancer Due to Sun Exposure

The sun is essential to all life on Earth; however, too much exposure to the sun can be harmful to us. Excessive exposure to ultraviolet light, also called UV rays, emitted from the sun can cause many skin conditions as well as skin cancer.

Skin Conditions Caused by Sun Exposure:

There are many effects the sun has on our skin. A little bit of exposure can help us get vitamin D which is a good thing; most effects from sun exposure are not good, however. Some skin conditions caused by sun exposure include wrinkles, freckles, discolored skin, benign tumors, and skin cancer.

Types of Skin Cancer:

Skin cancer is the most prevalent form of cancer in the United States. UV light from the sun is the number one cause of skin cancer. Contrary to popular belief, the UV light from tanning beds is just as bad for your skin. There are three types of skin cancer; basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma. Basal cell and squamous cell cancers are less serious types and make up 95% of all skin cancers. Also referred to as non-melanoma skin cancers, they are highly curable when treated early. Melanoma, made up of abnormal skin pigment cells called melanocytes, is the most serious form of skin cancer and causes 75% of all skin cancer deaths.

Over time, cumulative exposure to the sun causes basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas. More severe acute episodes of sunburn, especially at younger ages, are more likely to cause melanoma. It is very important to protect your kids from severe sunburn. People who are light skin or burn easily are most likely to get melanoma.

Safety Tips to Prevent Skin Cancer:

- The best thing to do is to avoid excessive exposure to the sun and tanning beds altogether.
- Wear sunscreen to protect your skin from UV rays. SPF 30 will protect you from UVB rays, and zinc oxide will protect you from UVA rays. Make sure to reapply it frequently when swimming or sweating.
- The majority of our exposure to the sun in our lifetime occurs during childhood. While it may be too late to worry about whether you had adequate protection when you were a kid, it is not too late to protect your kids or other young family members from being over-exposed to the sun.
- Periodically check yourself for irregular moles or markings on your skin. A new lesion on your skin, a new mole, or a change in an existing mole may indicate skin cancer.