

# BLOW THE WHISTLE ON SKIN CANCER



Do you love the warm feeling of the sun on your skin – that warmth you feel all the way to your bones? Do you love being outside walking, gardening, or even just reading a book on a park bench? OF COURSE YOU DO! Everyone wants to be outside living an active life and feeling healthy and vibrant. But what about the harmful effects of the sun? Did you know that up to 90% of skin changes that people think are related to aging are actually from the sun?

By now we all know that too much sun can cause skin damage. But what is “too much”? Too much sun = a lot of sun over your lifetime or more than one bad sunburn.

Skin damage, called photo-aging, not only contributes to wrinkles, but it can also cause loose or sagging skin or a loss of elasticity and firmness. It may also give your skin a leathery texture or cause spots and unevenness in color.

The good news is that your dermatologist has treatments to help you actually repair skin damage! Some options are: laser treatments, dermabrasion, chemical peels, and wrinkle fillers. A dermatologist can also prescribe topical creams or serums that help to reverse or repair sun damage, some options are: DNA repair serums, antioxidants, ceramides, skin-lightening products, and retinols.

The appearance of your skin may be your primary focus, but you cannot forget that excessive skin damage can lead to skin cancers. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. There are three types of cancer that are most commonly discussed:



Basal cell carcinoma is the most common skin cancer with about 1 million cases per year. While rarely fatal, it can be very disfiguring.



Squamous cell carcinoma is another common form of skin cancer, with about 250,000 cases and 2,500 deaths per year.



Melanoma is the most serious skin cancer, and is less common than basal or squamous cell cancers. Melanoma occurrences are growing faster than any other kind of cancer. Melanoma is often found in white men, but it also affects younger women with fair skin or with many moles. If detected early, the survival rate is nearly 99%.

## What can you do to protect your skin while enjoying outside activities?

**Self Examination** – Check your skin for any changes or new moles. And don’t just check the easy places – check your scalp, the back of your legs, under your breasts, and your back – use a mirror if necessary.

**Request Mole Mapping** – Your dermatologist can “map” your moles by taking photographs of your skin and comparing older photos to new photos for changes.

**Avoid Too Much Sun** – Use sun screen with an SPF of 15 or more (and don’t forget to re-apply!), wear a hat, or long sleeves, or a cover-up.

**See a Dermatologist Annually** – Get yourself checked by a professional and ask questions about your risk, your skin type, and any treatments that may be right for you.

Sources: American Cancer Society at [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org) and The Office on Women’s Health at [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)

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