

Beware of too much sun

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Friday, 04 May 2012 14:10 -



HARRINGTON

Skin cancer on rise

Want a great tan this spring and summer?

You'd better think twice.

According to the American Cancer Society, more than 81,000 Americans will be diagnosed with skin cancer in 2012.

May is National Skin Cancer Awareness Month.

Local surgeon John Harrington said excessive sun exposure should be avoided, noting that the American Academy of Dermatology says that no level of sun exposure is safe.

Harrington said the academy recommends getting vitamin D from vitamins and supplements, not the sun.

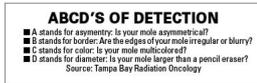
When going outside, they also recommend wearing a hat, sunscreen and sunglasses.

Sunscreen should have a SPF of 30 or higher, be water resistant and be re-applied every two hours.

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“Until we have more information, I like the zinc oxide-based ones best,” he said.



Another rule of thumb is to try and stay out of the sun when it's most direct, such as between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

“When your shadow is shorter than you,” Harrington said.

With melanoma cases on the rise, officials at the Skin Cancer Foundation are warning people to protect themselves while in the sun.

Tanning beds should be off limits since some skin cancer experts believe their use is a factor in climbing cancer rates because of ultraviolet radiation exposure.

An estimated 76,250 new cases of melanoma are expected this year, up 6,020 cases compared to 2011, according to the American Cancer Society.

The society said the number of melanoma-related deaths rose as well, by almost 400 cases, from 8,790 deaths in 2011 to a predicted 9,180 deaths in 2012.

Melanoma is the deadliest form of skin cancer—the fifth most common among men and sixth among women in the United States—and is caused by a series of sunburns, Harrington said.

“It doesn't just happen in Arizona and Florida,” he said. “I've seen a couple of cases here at the hospital.”

Harrington said basal cell and squamous cell skin cancer are probably more prevalent among

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farmers in the Gothenburg area.

“These kinds of cancer are different from melanoma,” he said. “They generally are not life threatening, if treated, but they can cause disfigurement.”

Harrington said dermatologists recommend getting a skin check every six months or more frequently.

“Our primary care doctors here would be glad to do it,” he said, noting that family members can also help check for places difficult to see such as the back or neck.

Keeping an eye on the skin also means paying attention to a skin bump or sore that’s growing, changing, bleeding or itching.

Although viewing pictures of skin cancer on the Internet can be helpful, Harrington said an experienced eye is needed.

“If in doubt, it’s better to remove a skin abnormality and be sure what it is rather than miss something serious,” he said.

The prognosis for all skin cancer, if caught early, is excellent, Harrington said.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636