



Health

It's not such a healthy glow after all

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun



About 7,800 people die from skin cancer each year

Photo courtesy googleimages.com
Just one severe sunburn as a young person can cause skin cancer to develop later in life.

GILBERTOWN – It is the most common form of cancer today ... and the most preventable. More than 400,000 Americans will be diagnosed with it this year. Yet for 90% of those victims, the disease could have been avoided simply by wearing sunscreen.

With tanning season about to begin, millions of Americans will take to the beach, to the pool, or to the tanning bed in order to get that perfect tan. But what appears to be a bronzed, healthy glow could be deadly.

According to the American Cancer Society, skin cancer makes up one third of all cancers diagnosed in the United States, and about 7,800 people will die from the disease this year alone.

The cancer The most common form of skin cancer is basal cell carcinoma – a single, small nodule or bump that generally appears on the face, ears, hands, head, or neck. The cancer has an appearance that is described as translucent, with little or no inflammation.

Although it is a slow-growing cancer that rarely spreads to other parts of the body, it can affect deep layers of the skin and even the bone if not caught early.

Squamous cell carcinoma is also found in some of the same areas of the body as is basal cell carcinoma, but it is also commonly seen on the mouth and the back of the hands. The cancer is characterized by red, scaly patches on the skin. This type of cancer typically grows faster than basal cell carcinoma.

The most deadly form of skin cancer is malignant melanoma, but it

also the least common, affecting about 27,000 new victims each year. Of those who are diagnosed with the disease, about 5,800 will die from it.

In its early stages, malignant melanoma is characterized as an asymmetric mole with an irregular border and a color that is not typical or the same throughout the mole.

Warning signs include any changes in the surface of a mole, as well as bleeding, elevation of the mole, or any changes in the way a mole feels, such as itchiness, tenderness, or pain.

The cause Although there are other causes – such as repeated exposure to x-ray or industrial radiation, scarring from disease or burns, or occupational exposure to such materials as tar, coal, or arsenic – more than 90% of all cases of skin cancer

are caused by overexposure to the sun, with much of that overexposure occurring early in life and producing a cumulative effect over time.

In fact, most sun exposure happens primarily in the teenage years. Studies show that as much as 80% of sun damage done to the skin happens before the age of 20, but that damage can cause problems much later in life.

When skin is exposed to the sun, the UVA and UVB radiation triggers a natural, biologic response to the harmful rays. A tan means that some damage has already been done. In fact, the tan is actually the appearance created when the skin is wounded by radiation.

Regardless of skin type, overexposure to the sun can affect anyone. However, there are risk factors that add to the incidence of cancer. Those

most at risk include people with light hair, fair skin, blue eyes, and those with Scottish, Irish, or Welsh ancestry.

Although women typically seek tanning more often than men, men are more likely to develop cancer from overexposure to the sun.

Certain areas of the country have much higher incidences of skin cancer. For example, people who live in the South are more prone to the disease because of the higher doses of ultraviolet rays that come from the sun in this geographic area.

People who live at higher elevations are also more at risk. At higher elevations, the less protection from ultraviolet rays is provided through the atmosphere.

But damage to the skin and the cancer that can result do not just happen after years of exposure. It can happen with one severe burn.

It is believed that one severe sunburn can double the chances of developing skin cancer. Two severe burns can triple the risk.

And that risk increases with increased exposure to the sun.

Today, the risk of skin cancer is even more pronounced with the increasing use of tanning beds, which can produce an even greater risk than traditional tanning. In fact, after decades of worldwide research, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), a branch of the World Health Organization (WHO), has linked tanning bed use among young people to large numbers of cases of melanoma.

The cure Even with the alarming statistics, the rate of cure for skin cancer is high ... if it is caught

Skin cancer prevention tips

The Skin Cancer Foundation gives the following tips for preventing skin cancer:

- Seek the shade, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Do not burn.
- Avoid tanning and UV tanning booths.
- Use a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher every day.
- Apply 1 ounce (2 tablespoons) of sunscreen to all exposed areas, 30 minutes before going outside.
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours or after swimming or excessive sweating.
- Cover up with clothing, including a broad-brimmed hat and UV-blocking sunglasses.
- Keep newborns out of the sun. Sunscreens should be used on babies over the age of six months.
- Examine your skin from head-to-toe every month.
- See your doctor every year for a professional skin exam.

early. For those who are diagnosed with basal cell or squamous cell carcinoma, the majority of cases can be easily treated and cured.

With malignant melanoma, however, the treatment and the cure is based primarily on how early the disease is diagnosed. Even with early diagnosis, the incidence of death from the disease is still significant.

By far the best answer to the high incidence of skin cancer is not to simply cure the disease, but to prevent it.

The American Cancer Society says that the most effective way to prevent skin cancer is to minimize exposure to the sun or tanning beds. Prevention can mean simply covering exposed skin when in the sun, wearing hats to protect the face, and wearing a sunscreen.

Although there are many factors to consider when choosing a Sun Pro-

tection Factor (SPF) in a sunscreen, basic guidelines include skin type, length of exposure, and how much exposure the skin has already suffered.

A rule of thumb when choosing an SPF is to multiply the time it takes for the skin to turn slightly pink by the SPF number on the product. The answer reveals the length of sun exposure that can occur before burning.

For those who choose tanning beds, the ACS urges their use in moderation – only allowing gradual tanning using protective lotions – or, better yet, not using tanning beds at all.

As this summer approaches, the ACS urges Americans – especially young people – to remember that what they do to their skin today may result in cancer in later years – a type of cancer that can be prevented, but one that can also be deadly.



Member of Firefighter 4 Fitness are inviting the public to attend their exercise program

Firefighters 4 Fitness encourages public to join new exercise program

CROMWELL – In an effort to promote healthy lifestyles and physical fitness, the Women's Auxiliary of the Cromwell/Halsell Volunteer Fire Department has been involved in an exercise program since February, 2006. The Firefighters 4 Fitness program has expanded to include a variety of exercise equipment for the Auxiliary and members of the community.

The program began as an aerobics-only program last February. In October, the group received a grant from the Choctaw County Parks and Recreation Board for \$3500 that enabled them to purchase 8 pieces of exercise equipment including 6 different types of equipment.

With about 15 people already taking advantage of the program, others are now being encouraged to join. The program is held on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays of each

week beginning at 6 p.m. with aerobics and equipment available each day.

Anyone interested in joining the program, or those requesting more information, should contact Program Coordinator Ethera Bryant at 205-398-3803, or Assistant Coordinator Juanita Johnson at 205-398-3233.

They can also be reached by email at cromwellhalsellvfd@tds.net.

WORSHIP SERVICES

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