band on the run

MEET TBO's BOD SQUAD
Follow along as our Weight Loss Challenge teams blog their way to better health. TBO.com

JOGGERS, GYM RATS PUMP UP THEIR WORKOUTS WITH PERSONALIZED PLAYLISTS PAGE 10

NEWS CHANNEL 8'S IRENE MAHER PAGE 4
[Ask The Expert]

Sunscreen Abuse Can Be Harmful To Your Skin — And Health

By NEIL ALAN FENSKE, M.D. Tribune correspondent

The good news is that most everyone now knows the importance of applying a layer of sunscreen before going outdoors. The bad news? Rampant cases of sunscreen abuse.

Ever apply your sunblock, then head to the beach for hours of body surfing and sunbathing? Or dab some on your face and arms for a day of yardwork?

You’ve committed sunscreen abuse. Because sunscreens do not provide 100 percent protection, despite the new, higher sun protection factor values, you still receive a significant amount of ultraviolet light, especially the nonbrowning ultraviolet A rays.

Moderation Is Key With The Sun

Ultraviolet rays produced by the sun cause skin cancer and premature aging of the skin.

Because living your life in a cave is not an option, I impress upon my patients the importance of moderation to balance the risks and benefits of sun exposure.

Avoid the peak hours of 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and remember that reflection from concrete, sand and snow can increase the amount of damaging rays. Reflection from the water is greatest early in the morning and late in the afternoon.

When sun avoidance is not feasible, the first line of protection is clothing — the tighter the fabric weave, the better the protection. Before sunscreens became widely available in the mid-’70s, most of our protection came from wearing a hat and clothing.

Today, we also have specialty hats and clothing made of fiber such as Solumba and Coolibar, engineered to block harmful rays while providing ventilation.

The second line of protection is applying the right type and amount of sunscreen.

The Science Behind Sunscreen

There are two types of ultraviolet rays from which we need protection: sunburn-causing ultraviolet B and tanning-producing ultraviolet A. UVB rays are known to cause skin cancer, and the more deeply penetrating UVA rays play a role in causing those unsightly wrinkles. Moreover, there is mounting evidence that UVA rays may be involved in causing the most onerous skin cancer, melanoma.

Protect yourself by using either a chemical (absorbs) or physical (reflects) sunscreen. Look for one labeled broad spectrum. Physical sunscreens made with micronized zinc oxide or titanium dioxide are preferred because they are more stable and less irritating to the skin.

Most broad-spectrum sunscreens do a better job of blocking burn-causing UVB rays than UVA rays. That means you won’t necessarily get a sunburn, nature’s warning sign, but you might get too much UVA.

Sunscreen abuse can help explain why skin cancer is sometimes associated with sunscreen use; it’s not the sunscreen, it’s the misuse. Sunscreen has no negative effects on the skin and does not cause skin cancer. Sunscreen abuse can lead to unintended excessive sun exposure.

Dr. Fenske is professor and director of the Division of Dermatology & Cutaneous Surgery at USF Health.