

## UV Safety Awareness Month – July

July is typically the hottest month of the year for those of us living in the Northern Hemisphere. It is also recognized as **National Ultraviolet (UV) Safety Month**, a public health initiative dedicated to raising awareness about the dangers of UV radiation and the importance of protecting our skin from its harmful effects.

### Understanding UV Radiation

Ultraviolet radiation is a form of electromagnetic energy emitted by both natural and artificial sources, such as the sun and tanning beds. UV rays are categorized into three main types based on their energy levels: **UVA, UVB, and UVC**.

- **UVA rays** have the lowest energy but can penetrate the skin deeply. They are primarily associated with skin aging and may contribute to the development of some skin cancers.
- **UVB rays** are more energetic than UVA rays and are more likely to damage the DNA in skin cells, significantly increasing the risk of skin cancer.
- **UVC rays** have the highest energy, but fortunately, they are absorbed by the Earth's atmosphere and do not reach the ground—making them the least concerning for everyday exposure.

### Skin Cancer and Risk Factors

Too much exposure to UV light can be harmful to our skin and eyes leading to wrinkles, sunburn, and skin cancers such as basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma (the deadliest form of skin cancer). According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, approximately **9,500 people in the United States are diagnosed with skin cancer every day**, making it the most common (and preventable) form of cancer in the United States. It's important to understand that **anyone—regardless of skin tone—can develop skin cancer**. However, certain factors can increase the risk, including:

- Spending extended periods outdoors or experiencing frequent sunburns
- Having fair skin, light-colored eyes, and hair
- Taking certain medications (oral or topical), such as antibiotics, birth control pills, benzoyl peroxide products, and some cosmetics, which can increase skin and eye sensitivity to UV rays
- A family history of skin cancer

### Prevention Strategies

The good news is that there are effective strategies to significantly reduce your risk:

- **Use sunscreen:** Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher daily.
- **Wear protective clothing:** Choose wide-brimmed hats, UV-blocking sunglasses, long-sleeved shirts, and pants.
- **Seek shade:** Avoid direct sun exposure during peak hours, typically from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- **Avoid tanning beds:** Artificial sources of UV radiation can be just as harmful as natural sunlight.

Additionally, **regularly checking the UV Index**—which measures the strength of UV radiation in your area—can help you plan your outdoor activities and determine the appropriate level of sun protection. Higher UV Index levels signal an increased risk of harm from unprotected sun exposure.

By staying informed and taking simple, proactive steps, you can protect yourself and others from the long-term health risks associated with UV exposure.

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