

PRACTICE SAFE SUN

Eight Tips to Protect You and Your Family

Being a college student in the early 90s... tan was in. The bolder the tan, the better we felt. To achieve just the right level of bronze, beginning every January, we would round up the girls on the AOII floor several times per week and head to the tanning salon. It was necessary to achieve just the right level of "fake bake" by the time spring break rolled around. And, on that right-of-passage trip for college students, there was no sunscreen in sight from Daytona Beach to Key West. Instead, we slathered on oils to make us tan faster and darker, making us resemble sizzling pieces of bacon in very cute bikinis!

Now, I'm a 39-year-old mom and, wow, how my views on sun safety have changed. I wear sunscreen every day rain or shine. My son (who also has fair, Irish skin that burns instead of tans) is the kid on the beach and at the park who spends more time having sunscreen reapplied than playing. Big hats, umbrellas and tents make the trek with us on our annual beach trips. And, I'd prefer to stick flaming needles in my eyes than place even my pinkie in a tanning bed (which, by the way, the flaming needles and tanning bed would elicit similar effects)!

The time I spent in the sun has left me with countless scars from moles that had to be removed. There are the twice yearly treks to the dermatologist for skin screenings. And, the wrinkles around my eyes and lips are becoming more apparent – another unpleasant sign that sun damage is present.

I now work in the skin care industry, so I may notice (and obsess over) the wrinkles, Crow's Feet and moles more than most folks do. My passion to help people achieve healthy skin compels me to pass along education and empowerment when it comes to sun safety. This passion led me to speaking with the ladies of Epsilon Omega at Eastern Kentucky University in March. I am fortunate to be a member of the Alumnae Advisory Committee for this chapter, which I pledged in 1989.

The sun is responsible for 80 percent of the effects of aging

When I walked into the chapter meeting loaded with tips and products, the girls were fresh off spring break. We talked about their beach trips, and I was pleased to learn that the girls definitely understand the dangers of tanning. Though, that still

doesn't mean they don't indulge. There were quite a few tans, which led to an open discussion about skin cancer and practicing safe sun.

A couple of stats that really hit home with the girls: the sun is responsible for 80 percent of the effects of aging, and 70 percent of the aging process starts before the age of 18. These numbers prove that you can never start practicing safe sun too early. Another sobering number: people who have been diagnosed with skin cancer have double the risk of developing another type of cancer when compared to those with no history of the disease. Dozens of the girls know someone who has been affected by Melanoma and I'm sure that most people do..

So, how can you protect yourself and your family? It's easier than you think.

Here are some great sun safety tips to keep on hand year round:



Tip #1 – Use sunscreen every day, rain or shine. By using sunscreen, you are protecting yourself against the silent killer – UVA. These rays are invisible and painless. You may have noticed an UVA index rating on your local news. Pay attention to these ratings as you don't have a warning signal to let you know that you have had too much exposure to UVA. To make sure that you have both UVA and UVB protection, you need more than an SPF of 15, which only measures UVB protection. Also, read the active ingredient label to make sure that aging-blocking elements such as titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, or anything in the avobenzone family are included.

Tip #2 – Reading sunscreen labels will soon be easier as the Food and Drug Administration will start using stars to rate sunscreens. The rating pertains to UVA. A zero rating means no protection, while four stars is the highest level. So, look for the stars!

Tip #3 – Don't skimp on sunscreen. The average-size body requires a shot-glass worth to achieve maximum coverage. By the way, don't use what's left of last year's sunscreen. Sun protection expires after 12 months.

Tip #4 – Don't fry, re-apply. While at the beach or other sun-drenched locations, re-applying your sunscreen every two hours is crucial to maintain sun protection. However, immediately re-apply after swimming or sweating.

Tip #5 – In addition to sunscreen, protective clothing plays a major role in your sun protection plan. The Federal Trade Commission promotes wearing sun-protective fabrics that have a tight weave or knit and are usually darker in color. The clothing's label should also list the UPF (ultraviolet protective factor) value. And, your eyes are extremely sensitive to the sun, so wearing UV protection sunglasses is a true health benefit.



Tip #6 – Check your moles. Moles, brown spots and growths on the skin are usually harmless – but not always. Skincancer.org reports that anyone who has more than 100 moles is at greater risk for melanoma. The first signs can appear in one or more atypical moles, which is why it's so important to know your skin very well. Look for the ABCDEs of melanoma, and if you see one or more, make an appointment with a physician.

- **A**symmetry - If you draw a line through this mole, the two halves will not match and be uneven.
- **B**order - The borders of an early melanoma tend to be uneven. The edges may be scalloped or notched.
- **C**olor - Having a variety of colors is another warning signal. A number of different shades of brown, tan or black could appear. A melanoma may also become red, blue or some other color.
- **D**iameter - Melanomas usually are larger in diameter than the size of the eraser on your pencil (1/4 inch or 6 mm), but they may sometimes be smaller when first detected.
- **E**volving - Any change in size, shape, color, elevation, or any new symptom such as bleeding, itching or crusting points to danger.

Tip #7 – Double up on safety by using a 20 percent concentration of topical Vitamin C under your sunscreen daily to protect skin cells from UV damage, reduce the appearance of brown spots, and strengthen the skin's immune defense.

Tip #8 – Glow safely by using self-tanner. Look for a fragrance free (for a better smell) self-tanner formulation that incorporates an AHA for better penetration. For face, alternate your regular moisturizer and a self-tanner every other night for a natural glow. For the body, be careful to avoid elbows, knees and heels so you look natural and the tanner doesn't darken the folds.

About the Author:

Debra Locker Griffin, Epsilon Omega (Eastern Kentucky U) is a current member of the AAC) resides in Lexington, KY with her husband Ron and three-year-old son Bryce. With 16 years in communications, including roles in broadcast journalism and in-house public relations, Debra founded Locker Public Relations (www.lockerpr.com) in Sept. 2008.

With a niche in the wellness industry, Debra is the publicist for the leading skin care lifestyle company Skin Authority.

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