

Skin Cancer

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Like everything else in the world there are positives and negatives to heavy sun exposure and sunburns. The positives are- if you are often sunburned then you are probably having a great time outdoors, catching a lot of waves, or exploring the world. The negatives are basically skin cancer. No one really wants to think about it, but here is some information on skin cancer that I believe is important for everyone to know. For starters we have to recognize that cancer – just over all cancer - is very serious. It's the second leading cause of death worldwide with heart disease being the first.

Although skin cancer is usually not as life threatening as, say, lung cancer -melanoma, a type of skin cancer, can be just as deadly. Melanoma is cancer of the melanocytes -melanocytes are a type of skin cell designed to produce the pigment melanin that gives our skin its color. Melanin also serves to protect the skin's DNA from UV radiation. It kind of acts like an umbrella blocking or absorbing the UV rays -preventing them from harming our DNA. This is why people with light skin or fair complexions are at higher risk for getting skin cancer –they don't have as much melanin to protect their DNA.

It's very important to identify skin cancer early, especially melanoma, because in the early stages of melanoma the cancer cells are usually incapable of



metastasizing or spreading to other parts of the body. But after as little as a few months melanoma's cancer genetic code can mutate to gain the ability to metastasize. Although treatment for melanoma has improved significantly over the past ten years, once it spreads or metastasizes to other parts of the body it's a totally different ball game, the patient would most likely have to receive heavy cancer treatment and the chances of dying become much higher. So what can you do? Try to protect yourself from the sun by wearing sun screen, covering up with clothes, and avoiding the sun during some of the peak / high intensity times of day. Keep a look out for moles on your body that are new, getting bigger, or are very dark. And if something does not look right, or you are concerned, get it checked out. It's always good to keep on top of things and take charge of your health.