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Health/Fitness

## Summer's Archenemy: The Paradoxical Sun

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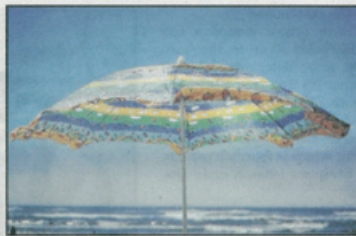
Leave it to the sun to ruin all the fun. We've waited all year long for beaching, boating, pooling, biking, all things summer. And what do we do? Dodge the element of happiness we desired most, brilliant beautiful sunshine.

With good reason. According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the U.S. with more than one million skin cancers diagnosed every year. But do not fear. There are ways to play under the much-feared fireball in the sky without it searing our skin and causing cancerous melanomas. Protection and prevention is the way to go. Of course, avoiding it altogether would be the smartest thing to do, but let's be real. Abstinence would be no fun at all.

Let's go over the basics first. As most of us depend on sunscreen for protection, proper application of it is essential. Dr. Lance H. Brown, President-Elect of the Dermatologic Society of Greater New York with practices in Manhattan and Wainscott reviewed its proper usage. "Sunscreens are not magic protection from the sun. You need to apply sunscreen 30 minutes before you go outside. You also need to reapply every two hours, and more often if you are in the water," Dr. Brown explained.

As for the SPF numbers, which are a source of confusion for most, the numbers really do mean something. "The SPF can be very important. An SPF of 15 blocks 93% of harmful rays, 30 blocks 97%, 50 blocks 99%, said Dr. Brown. There is now a 70 out there on the market, and apparently the numbers will go higher in time.

One of the most surprising facts about the sun-



screen is the amount you have to use. Dr. Brown says a half of an eight-ounce tube for every full day in the sun. Gasp! With the price of sunscreen, that's big bucks for some sun-filled fun. I guess you play, you pay.

If you want to go above and beyond the call of sunscreen there all types of protective clothing and gear to aid in the blockage of those horrible UVB rays. Now there are beach umbrellas, hats, beach tents and clothing that can act as an extra shield as they are made out of special sun-protective fabric. Some manufacturers of these products include Coolibar, Rio Brands, Sunbrella, and Sun Busters.

As with any cancer, early detection of skin cancer is key. It's a good idea to check your entire body periodically for the "ugly duckling," what melanoma experts have dubbed the cancerous moles you should be looking for. This means you should watch out for any mark on your body that looks different from anything else on your skin. Skin cancer professionals

have also developed a helpful acronym, ABCDE, to assist in defining a dangerous mole:

A = asymmetry, one side is not symmetrical with the other

B = border, the border of the mole is jagged and uneven

C = color, the mole is more than one hue

D = diameter, the mole is larger than 1/8 inch

E = elevated, the mole is raised (or) evolving, the mole's characteristics keep changing

Although self-examination is a helpful practice, a yearly visit to a dermatologist will insure detection of any suspicious mole.

Lastly, let's break some myths about skin cancer and sun exposure. Myth/Fact #1: Many people believe that 80% of a person's lifetime sun exposure happens by the age of 18. Not the case. Only about 23% of a person's lifetime sun exposure occurs by the age of 18 (sun exposure has a cumulative effect; the percentage rises with age). Myth/Fact #2: Although fair-skinned people have an increased risk of skin cancer, people of any skin color, including African-Americans, can fall victim to skin cancer. Myth/Fact #3: Yes, you can get a sunburn on a cloudy day. Although haze and clouds filter about 80% of the sun's rays, that leaves 20% to sift through.

An informative reference on skin cancer prevention and detection is [skincancer.org](http://skincancer.org). They give lots of interesting facts about types of skin cancers, statistics and data, best products for protection from the sun, explanations of ingredients in sunscreens and proper usage, and most importantly signs for early detection.

Enjoy a sun-blocked, UVB-free summer.