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FEEL HEALTHIER."

- KAILANI, EWA BEACH, HAWAII



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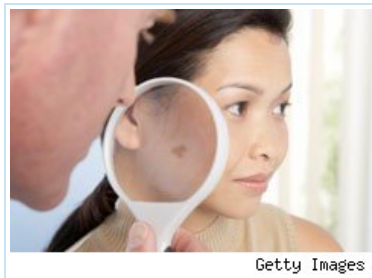
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More Sickened With Skin Cancer Than All Other Cancers Combined

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By [Ronnie Koenig](#)

If you have access to a TV, radio or newspaper, then you know the importance of using sunscreen to avoid developing skin cancer. But it seems that the sunning habits of men and women who grew up in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s are now coming back to bite them.

People who spent their days baking in the sun, using reflectors and slathering on baby oil are now paying a high price. According to two new reports in the March issue of "Archives of Dermatology," non-melanoma skin cancer has reached epidemic proportions and affects more individuals than all other cancers combined.

When it comes to skin cancer, there are three types you need to know about: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma. Non-melanoma skin cancer is the most common malignant disease in the United States and, according to Robert S. Stern, M.D., of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard Medical School, Boston, approximately 13 million white, non-Hispanic Americans had at least one non-melanoma skin cancer in 2007.

"People focus on melanoma because of the substantial risk of it leading to death," says Dr. Stern. "People get confused by what they have – if you have non-melanoma skin cancer, it should change what you do going forward."

Dr. Stern agrees that the prefix "non" can lead some people to believe that their skin cancer is not that serious. "Squamous cell can lead to death. Basal cell cannot, but it can cause substantial disfigurement on the head and neck," he says.

In a second article, Howard W. Rogers, M.D., Ph.D., of Advanced Dermatology, Norwich, Conn., and colleagues found an increase of 76.9 percent in the number of procedures to treat skin cancer in the Medicare population from 1992 to 2006. Study authors call the increase of non-melanoma skin cancer "an epidemic" that has not been adequately addressed by educational programs.

So why the rise in non-melanoma?

"People who grew up in the 40s, 50s and 60s are now reaching the age where tumors develop," explains Dr. Stern. "Also, the population is living longer. These cancers generally affect the 50 [and older] set."

Michele S. Green, M.D., a New York City dermatologist, says she agrees 100 percent with the studies because she sees it for herself every day in her practice. "Patients come in here for other things – dark spots, cosmetic things, and I screen everyone for skin cancer. I had an older woman, 65 or 70, come in for Botox. I asked her when was her last skin exam. I ended up taking off seven basal and squamous cell carcinomas that day."

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"People get their cholesterol checked, but they just don't think about going to a dermatologist," says Dr. Green. "When I tell them they have skin cancer I get a shocked reaction. ... I see people on the Jersey Shore out baking, their kids are getting burnt. It's frightening."

"Young people can substantially reduce their lifetime risk by using an SPF of 15 or greater on a daily basis on exposed areas -- ears, face, neck, backs of the hands," says Dr. Stem. "For older people sun protection is still important. Even if you've had non-melanoma, you can reduce the risk of getting another one by 50 percent. Early detection can mean you need a simpler procedure."

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