

Get the Skinny on Your Skin!

Did you know that your skin is the largest organ in your body? For adults, your skin is responsible for approximately 16% of your total body weight. Our skin has many important functions, such as protecting our body from injury, infection, water loss and sunlight.

The summer sun is a welcome sight to many of us after the sub-zero temperatures of the winter months. However, sunlight contains ultraviolet rays (UV) which can increase the incidence of skin cancer, premature skin aging and cataracts. It is estimated that 90% of all skin cancers could be prevented by learning to protect ourselves from the UV light of the sun.

The daily UV Index (which predicts the strength of the sun's ultraviolet rays) can be obtained by listening to your local weather station. There are 3 types of UV rays:

- Ultraviolet A rays (UVA) make up most of the sun's natural light. They can penetrate deep into the skin causing wrinkles and photoaging.
- Ultraviolet B rays (UVB) are the most damaging to our skin. They are the main cause of sunburns as they are nearly 1000 times stronger than UVA rays.
- Ultraviolet C rays (short-wave radiation) never reach the earth's surface because the atmosphere filters them out.

The good news is that it is possible to enjoy activities in the sun. The following guidelines are suggestions to reduce the potential risk of skin cancer while at work and play outdoors.

- The sun's rays are strongest between the hours of **11am and 4pm** - try to reduce your sun exposure during this time. A tip to remember - during these hours your shadow is shorter than you are.
- Bring an **umbrella** and make your own shade when at the beach or in an area without natural shade such as trees with dense foliage.
- Cover your skin with loose, lightweight, **tightly woven clothing**.
- Wear a **wide-brimmed hat** that covers your head, neck and ears. Most skin cancers occur on the face and neck.
- Apply a **sunscreen** with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 15 or higher. Look for "**broad spectrum**" on the label as this means the sunscreen offers protection against both UVA and UVB. Be sure to reapply frequently, especially after swimming and exercise.
- Wear **sunglasses** with medium to dark lenses that have both UVA and UVB protection.

Ultraviolet (UV) Index (Environment Canada)

Rating	UV Index Reading	Tips
Low	UV Index of 4 or less	If you are out more than 1 hour wear sunscreen and sunglasses, especially on snow
Moderate	UV Index of 4 to 6.9	Find shade, wear a hat, sunglasses, clothing and sunscreen
High	UV Index of 7 to 8.9	Avoid sun between 11am and 4pm. Take precautions as listed above.
Extreme	UV Index of Over 9	Burns and skin damage can happen quickly. Reducing time spent in the sun is most important.

Common Sun Myths....

- Myth:** *You must have a sunburn to get skin cancer.*
Fact: *Sun damage is cumulative. With each exposure to sunlight whether you burn or not, damage to your skin is occurring.*
- Myth:** *A tan can protect you from sun damage.*
Fact: *A tan signals damage to your skin. Over time, tanned skin becomes more wrinkled, leathery and blotchy. The Canadian Cancer Society states there is "no such thing as a safe tan".*
- Myth:** *You need lots of sunlight to maintain good health.*
Fact: *UVB rays help produce vitamin D in the skin. However, only a few minutes of sunlight per day will help your body develop enough Vitamin D. In fact, most Canadians meet their daily requirement of Vitamin D through their diets.*
- Myth:** *Sun damage is temporary if you allow your skin to heal between times spent in the sun.*
Fact: *Sun damage builds with each exposure. Our skin can repair the superficial damage of a sunburn, but the underlying damage remains and accumulates.*
- Myth:** *If it is cloudy or foggy you need not worry about sun protection.*
Fact: *Up to 80% of the sun's rays can penetrate clouds, mist and fog.*
- Myth:** *You cannot get a sunburn in the shade.*
Fact: *If you are near reflective surfaces such as snow, sand and concrete, sun damage can occur. In fact, UVA rays can penetrate glass e.g. the windshield of your car.*
- Myth:** *If you have darker skin, you are already protected from getting a sunburn.*
Fact: *Everyone needs to protect their skin from the ultraviolet rays of the sun regardless of their skin type. People with darker skin will have a more natural protection, however their skin will suffer skin damage with prolonged exposure.*
- Myth:** *Tanning beds can protect you from some forms of cancer by increasing your vitamin D levels.*
Fact: *Most tanning beds emit UVA rays when it is UVB rays that help produce vitamin D. Health Canada advises that tanning beds may expose you to 5 times as much UVA as the sun.*

Sources for Resources: www.cancer.ca

Your Risk of Skin Cancer

The most common of all human cancers occur on the skin. The number of skin cancer cases in Canada have increased by 67% since 1990. We are now exposed to more ultraviolet rays due to the protective ozone layer around the earth becoming significantly thinner as a result of the effects of pollution and chemicals.

The risk of developing skin cancer is elevated for people who:

- have light-coloured skin, eyes and hair
- work, play or exercise in the sun
- had blistering sunburns as a child
- have a family history of skin cancer

Early detection of skin cancer is crucial, as most skin cancers can be cured. When examining your skin watch for:

- any change in a mole or birthmark e.g. shape, color, size or surface
- any new skin growth - pale, pearly nodule that crust or red, scaly patches
- any sore that does not heal
- any patch of skin that bleeds, swell or oozes

If you discover skin changes or are concerned about what you should be looking for, you may want to consult your physician or primary health care provider for guidance.

Computer Vision Syndrome

Do you squint and strain to read your computer monitor? Are your eyes burning, dry, fatigued or irritated? Do you experience from blurred vision and light sensitivity? Do you develop headaches, neck and shoulder pain from leaning forward to read? Well, you are not alone, approximately 75 % of computer users complain of 'computer vision syndrome.'

The following simple steps may help alleviate some of these symptoms and can often be done without leaving your office.

1. Reduce eye dryness

When using a computer, people tend to open their eyes wider than normal and blink 2/3 less often which can lead to dry and irritated eyes. To minimize this tendency:

- Make a conscious effort to remember to blink more frequently, such as a reminder note attached to your monitor.
- Take a visual break. Several times an hour, look around your office and focus on a variety of distances. Once an hour, take a 15 minute break, such as doing paper work.
- Make sure you take in your 8 glasses of water a day.
- Try to decrease air flow and increase humidity in your office environment
- Consider lubricating eye drops.

2. Glare and Reflection

Office lighting and sunlight can result in glare and reflections which can cause eyes to tire quickly. To decrease these effects:

- Angle your monitor slightly downwards to decrease any overhead glares.
- Position your monitor so windows are at the side and not in front or behind your monitor.
- Use the window blinds to adjust sunlight off your screen and away from your eyes.
- Turn off overhead lights if they are too bright, consider lower wattage bulbs or a desk lamp.
- Move any desk lamps to a spot where they don't reflect on your monitor or shine in your eyes.
- Consider looking at glare filter screens or a glare blocking hoods available from your business supply store.

3. Monitor your monitor

- Position your monitor so it is a working distance of 20-26 inches from your chair.
- Adjust the monitor height so your vision falls on a slightly downward angle.
- Remove any dust or finger print smears regularly to decrease eye strain.
- Use a document holder and position it near your monitor to decrease vision fatigue from looking back and forth repeatedly.

4. Brightness and Contrast

Most monitors have adjustable brightness and contrast settings right on their front panel.

- To see if your monitor's brightness is correct, first check your office's brightness. If your office is too bright, your monitor may be over bright in order to be readable. To check, look at a screen with a white background, if this screen is as bright as your office's light source, it's too bright. If the screen is greyish, your office is not bright enough. If your office light is neither bright nor dark, adjust the brightness in the mid range. Your goal is to have your room and monitor's brightness the same.
- After the brightness is set, adjust your contrast to the highest level you are comfortable with.

If you experience regular eye strain, irritation, dryness or discomfort, you may want to contact your physician or eye care professional for an assessment.

MDM Insurance Services Inc.

For additional copies please contact MDM administration at 1-800-838-1531

The material provided in this newsletter is for your information only and is not intended to replace the advice prescribed by your physician.