

Circle Of LifeSM: Cancer Education and Wellness for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities



American Cancer Society Circle Of LifeSM
Cancer Education and Wellness for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

**Wellness Along the Cancer Journey:
Healthy Habits and Cancer Screening**

Revised October 2015

Chapter 4: Sun Safety



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Sun Safety

Group Discussion

- 1) You should limit direct exposure to sunlight between the hours of _____ and _____.
 - a) 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.
 - b) 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
 - c) 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.
 - d) Noon and 4 p.m.

- 2) You should use a broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least _____ every time you are out in the sun.
 - a) You don't need to use sunscreen unless you're at the lake or beach.
 - b) 8 SPF
 - c) 30 SPF
 - d) 100 SPF

Sunburns will fade, but damage to deeper layers of skin remains and over time can cause cancer. That's why sun-safe habits should begin in childhood and last a lifetime. Everyone's skin and eyes can be affected by the sun and other forms of ultraviolet (UV) rays. Although people with light skin are much more likely to have sun damage and skin cancer, people with darker skin can also be affected. This includes American Indians and Alaska Natives.

People with darker skin tan more easily than others, but tanning is still a form of skin damage. Tanning occurs when UV radiation is absorbed by the skin. It causes an increase in the activity and number of melanocytes, the cells that make the pigment melanin. Melanin gives the skin its color. It also helps to block out damaging UV rays up to a point, which is why people with darker skin burn less quickly than people with lighter skin. While sunburns are thought to increase a person's risk of skin cancer, especially melanoma, UV exposure even without sunburn can raise skin cancer risk.

Some people think about sun protection only when they spend a day at the lake, beach, or pool. But sun exposure adds up day after day, and it happens every time a person is in the sun. While brief exposures to sunlight help the body make Vitamin D to stay healthy, too much sunlight can cause cancer.

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Steps to Limit Exposure to UV Rays:

Cover Up: When people are out in the sun, they should wear clothes that protect as much skin as possible. Long-sleeved shirts, long pants, or long skirts cover the most skin. Dark colors generally provide more protection than light colors. A tightly woven fabric protects better than loosely woven clothing. Dry fabric usually protects more than wet fabric.

Use Sunscreen: A sunscreen is a product that is applied to the skin to help protect against the sun's UV rays. Sunscreens come in many forms – lotions, creams, ointments, gels, wipes, and lip balms, to name a few. Choose a broad spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher. (Broad spectrum means that the sunscreen blocks both UVA and UVB rays.) Be sure to use enough and re-apply it every couple of hours while you're in the sun.

Wear a Hat: A hat with at least a two to three-inch brim all around is ideal. It protects areas often exposed to the sun, such as the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp. A shade cap (which looks like a baseball cap with about seven inches of fabric draping down the sides and back) is also good. A baseball cap can protect the front and top of the head but not the back of the neck or the ears, where skin cancers often grow. Straw hats are not recommended unless they are tightly woven.

Wear Sunglasses: Sunglasses that block UV rays can help protect the eyes from sun damage. Check the label of the sunglasses before you buy them to make sure they absorb both UVA and UVB rays. Some labels may say, "UV absorption up to 400 nm". This is the same as 100% UV absorption. Sunglasses do not have to cost a lot of money to have UV protection.

Limit Midday Sun Exposure: UV rays are most intense during the middle of the day, usually between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm. To check the sun's intensity, use the shadow test: If a person's shadow is shorter than they are, the sun's rays are the strongest. If possible stay out of the sun at this time. If people must be outdoors during this time, they should protect their skin.

Avoid Tanning Beds and Sunlamps: Tanning beds and lamps give out both UVA and UVB rays. These rays can cause serious long-term skin damage and cause skin cancer.

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Protect Children From the Sun: Children need special attention, since they tend to spend more time outdoors and can burn more easily. Parents and others who care for them should be sure their children wear clothes, hats, sunglasses, and sunscreen to protect them from harmful UV rays.

Check The Skin

A person can check their skin each month to look for signs of skin cancer. Some parts of the skin – for example, behind the ears and on the back – may be hard to see. A family member or friend may be able to help a person examine these areas. If not, a person can use a wall mirror along with a hand mirror to see them. The first time someone inspects their skin, they should spend a fair amount of time carefully going over the entire surface of the skin. Don't forget the scalp, soles of feet, fingernails, toenails, and groin. Learning the pattern of moles, blemishes, freckles, and other marks on the skin will help someone notice any changes next time. Any trouble spots should be seen by a health care provider.

The "ABCD rule" is an easy guide to checking the skin for certain changes that could be signs of a skin cancer called melanoma. Melanoma is less common than basal or squamous cell skin cancers, but it is far more dangerous. It causes many more deaths than other skin cancers. People should be on the lookout and tell their health care provider about any spots that match the following description:

- *A* is for *ASYMMETRY*: One half of a mole or birthmark does not match the other.
- *B* is for *BORDER*: The edges are irregular, ragged, notched, or blurred.
- *C* is for *COLOR*: The color is not the same all over and may include shades of brown or black, or sometimes with patches of pink, red, white, or blue.
- *D* is for *DIAMETER*: The spot is larger than six millimeters across (about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch -- the size of a pencil eraser), although melanomas can sometimes be smaller than this.

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Asymmetry

Border

Color

Diameter

Another very important sign of possible melanoma is a change in the size, shape, or color of a mole or the appearance of a new spot.

Some melanomas do not fit the ABCD rule described above. That is why it is very important for a person to tell their health care provider about any changes in skin markings or new spots on their skin. And there are other types of skin cancer that need attention – melanoma is not the only one.

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Activity

Skin Cancer Word Search

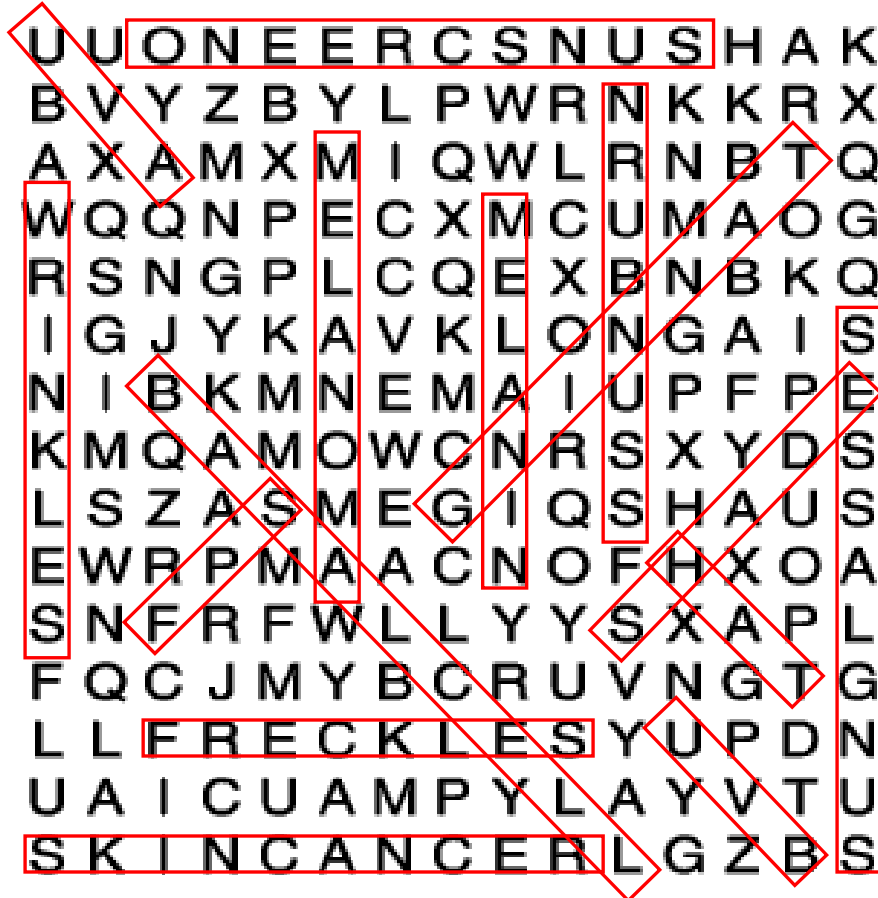
U U O N E E R C S N U S H A K
B V Y Z B Y L P W R N K K R X
A X A M X M I Q W L R N B T Q
W Q Q N P E C X M C U M A O G
R S N G P L C Q E X B N B K Q
I G J Y K A V K L O N G A I S
N I B K M N E M A I U P F P E
K M Q A M O W C N R S X Y D S
L S Z A S M E G I Q S H A U S
E W R P M A A C N O F H X O A
S N F R F W L L Y Y S X A P L
F Q C J M Y B C R U V N G T G
L L F R E C K L E S Y U P D N
U A I C U A M P Y L A Y V T U
S K I N C A N C E R L G Z B S

Basal Cell
Freckles
Hat
Melanin
Melanoma
Skin Cancer
Shade
SPF
Sunburn
Sunglasses
Sunscreen
Tanning
UVA
UVB
Wrinkles

(Texas A & M System Agrilife Extension, (2009). *Cool in the shade: What Do You Know*. Retrieved September 10, 2009, from <http://coolshade.tamu.edu/puzzle.htm>)

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Skin Cancer Word Search Answers



- Basal Cell
- Freckles
- Hat
- Melanin
- Melanoma
- Skin Cancer
- Shade
- SPF
- Sunburn
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Tanning
- UVA
- UVB
- Wrinkles

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Key Messages

- Slip on a shirt, slap on a hat, slop on some sunscreen, and wear sunglasses whenever outdoors.
- Teach children and grandchildren to wear clothes that will protect them from the sun's rays. Make sure they wear a broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher.
- Let others know about the dangers of getting too much sun and the importance of wearing sunscreen every day.
- Work with the community to offer plenty of shade and sunscreen during outdoor community events.