



FAQs – Malignant Melanoma

Who has the highest risk of getting melanoma?

The risk of developing melanoma is higher in somebody with fair skin that burns and freckles easily, and in those with numerous moles. A history of sunburn especially in childhood and adolescence, and a history of melanoma in another family member also contribute to a higher risk of melanoma. Frequent exposure to the sun, especially for recreational purposes, also increases the danger of developing melanoma. On a universal level, melanoma is equally common in men and women. Melanoma can occur at any age; however it is extremely rare in childhood.

What has caused the increasing incidence of melanoma?

Apart from the ozone layer depletion, people's behaviour in the sun has been the main cause for the rise in skin cancer rates in recent decades. An increase in the popularity of outdoor activities and sunbathing has led to excessive UV exposure. Many people consider a suntan a symbol of attractiveness and good health. However, a suntan is merely a sign of UV damage and represents the skin's attempt to minimise further harm.

How can the chances of surviving melanoma be improved?

The key to a favourable outcome is early detection and timely surgical treatment. Periodic self-examination of the skin in addition to seeking medical attention when in doubt should become standard practice if we expect to keep the mortality rate from melanoma at the lowest possible level.

What are the other harmful effects of the sun on the skin?

Besides melanoma, the sun induces other forms of skin cancer, which though not usually fatal, often result in significant disfigurement. The sun's ultraviolet rays also cause premature ageing of the skin in the form of wrinkles, blemishes, coarseness, broken veins, and scaly patches (Photodamage).

Is it safe to stay in the sun for long periods as long as one is wearing sunscreen?

A total sunblock in the real sense of the word does not yet exist. Variable amounts of longer wavelength UV rays (UVA) do not get filtered by currently available sunscreens in spite of the high factor formulations that exist. The cumulative effect of these unfiltered rays can still lead to skin cancer and premature ageing of the skin. One should not stay in the sun too long under the false impression that the sun's rays are completely blocked by sunscreen. Sun exposure should be avoided between the hours of 11am to 3pm, when the sun's rays are most extreme.

Is a fake tan safer than a suntan?

A fake tan (self-tanning creams/sprays) is by far safer than a suntan. A fake tan produces a natural looking tan through a chemical reaction in the skin. It therefore gives the desired cosmetic result in someone who is very keen to have a tan, without him or her having to sunbathe. Application of fake tan needs to be carried out every 1-2 weeks in order to maintain the tan since the top layers of the skin are constantly being renewed. However, the actual tanning produced by a fake tan is not at all protective against UV-radiation and consumers should be aware of this important factor.

Is it ok to get an artificial tan from a tanning bed or booth?

One word of warning about tanning beds and booths. These induce skin tanning by means of Ultraviolet A radiation, which, though very efficient in tanning the skin without burning, still significantly increases the risk of skin cancer and is no doubt extremely efficient in causing premature skin ageing. Something that perhaps most people may not be aware of is that a tan acquired from these tanning units does not protect their skin from sunburn when they go out in the sun.

As at: ...

Press contact: Dr Myrto Trakatelli: mtrakatelli@hotmail.com