

## 80 Percent of Sun Damage is Not Received by Age 18

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You don't go in the snow without your boots and you don't go in the rain without your umbrella, so you shouldn't go in the sun without your sunscreen. Many take a relaxed approach toward applying sunscreen once they reach their adult years because they assume the damage is already done, but recent studies suggest that sun damage is cumulative over a person's lifetime. "For years dermatologists believed that the majority of sun exposure was received before the age of 18," says Dr. Perry Robins, president of the Skin Cancer Foundation. "We now know that the damage is typically spread out over the course of a lifetime. That's why it's so important to be diligent about sun protection at every age, especially as we head into summer."

Reported in Sun and Skin News, a publication of The Skin Cancer Foundation, a multi-center study led by Dr. Dianne Godar showed that we receive less than 25 percent of our total sun exposure by age 18. For over two

years Dr. Godar's team analyzed the data they found as well as the outdoor activity profiles of almost 10,000 Americans and found the cumulative average percent of lifetime sun exposure (based on a 78 year lifespan) for people ages 1 to 18 is about 23 percent, ages 19 to 40 is about 47 percent, ages 41 to 59 is about 74 percent and ages 60 to 78 is 100 percent.

Most sun damage and skin cancer are the result of overexposure to the invisible form of radiation the sun emits, called ultraviolet (UV) radiation. UV rays penetrate the skin, altering the structure of its cells and can be found in natural sunlight or tanning beds. UVA is the sun's visible light that can penetrate beyond the skin's surface to its middle layer. UVB penetrates only the epidermal skin layer and is less abundant but more harmful.

Excessive exposure to UVA and UVB rays can result in extreme sun burns, premature aging, easily bruised skin, black and white heads, benign skin tumors and skin cancer. Although everyone's at risk, the probability of acquiring sun damage, particularly cancer, increases with the following factors: fair skin; light-colored eyes and hair; lack of sun protection; serious sunburns; moles, birthmarks or freckles; and also if a person spends a lot of time outdoors, has a family history of skin cancer, doesn't wear sunscreen, tans frequently or uses tanning beds.

The three most prevalent forms of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and malignant melanoma. Basal cell carcinoma is recognized as a small, fleshy, shiny lump that rarely spreads; squamous cell carcinoma is a scaly, red patch or lump that appears on the ears, face, mouth or lips that can spread to other areas of the body and become fatal; and malignant melanoma appears as a dark patch or mole that may have shades of white, blue or red, and if left untreated can metastasize to other areas of the body and become fatal. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, melanoma is the most common type of cancer among women between the ages of 25 to 29, and approximately every hour somebody dies from it.

Although skin cancer affects one out of every five Americans, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, it can most often be treated if caught in its early stages. "Have your skin evaluated by a board –certified dermatologist if you have any concerning spots," says Dr. Amy Derick of Derick Dermatology. "Dermatologists are experts in the diagnosis and treatment of skin cancer."