

Watch out for those tanning beds — they're linked to skin cancer

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In the United States, more than 419,000 cases of skin cancer are linked each year to indoor tanning, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. PR Newswire

Skin cancer has been on the rise for the last 30 years, and each year there are more new cases of skin cancer than the combined incidence of breast, prostate, lung and colon cancers, according to the [Skin Cancer Foundation](#).

Ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun — including those you get from indoor tanning devices — cause cancer.

There are three main types of skin cancers — basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma. The first two — basal cell and squamous cell — are linked more to indoor tanning than melanoma, which is the deadliest form of skin cancer.

In the United States, about 245,000 basal cell and 168,000 squamous cell carcinomas develop each year as a result of [indoor tanning](#), compared with 6,200 melanomas, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. In fact, more people develop skin cancer because of tanning than develop lung cancer because of smoking, the Foundation reports.

But while melanoma is less likely to come from tanning beds, it's the most dangerous type of skin cancer because it can spread and attack major organs, such as the brain and lungs. The American Cancer Society estimates about 87,110 new melanoma cases will be diagnosed in the U.S. in 2017. At the same time, about 9,730 people will die from it.

Most early-stage skin cancers can be removed with surgery. ([Mohs surgery](#), which expunges cancerous cells while sparing much of the healthy tissue, is considered the gold standard.)

For melanoma, research is leading to possible new treatments, although any new drug or therapy still has to be proven on humans, not just mice.

Michigan State University researchers Richard Neubig and Kate Appleton found a chemical compound that can reduce the spread of melanoma cells by up to 90 percent in mice. Their findings were published in the January issue of *Molecular Cancer Therapeutics*.

“Right now, we have many ways to attack metastatic melanoma — many show promising results, but nothing is a magic bullet,” said Dr. Catherine Balestra, Mohs surgeon at Minars Dermatology in Hollywood. “This research is a new approach to treat the deadliest of melanomas, metastatic melanomas, which have the ability to move from the skin to your lymph nodes and then other organs such as your lungs or brain. If melanoma can't spread to other organs, then it can be contained.”

While the study is groundbreaking, it has only been tested on mice so far. Neubig and his team hope to start working toward human clinical trials in the next couple of years.

Meanwhile, research has already led to some significant developments in cancer treatment, in general.

“The two most important recent developments for treating cancer are genetic testing and immunotherapy,” said Dr. Jose Lutzky, director of the Mount Sinai Medical Center melanoma program and chief of the division of hematology and oncology.

Immunotherapy stimulates a person's own immune system to recognize and destroy cancer cells. Targeted therapy can find and target abnormal genes and proteins in the cells.

“Everything is changing,” Lutzky said. “We can now cut out a tumor and send it to a lab, and within a week we have its genome. We can see what’s driving the growth of the cancer. And we have drugs that can interfere with those pathways.”

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SKIN CANCER

The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends monthly head-to-toe self-exams to check for any new moles or growths, or existing growths that begin to grow or change significantly. There’s a step-by-step tutorial at skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/early-detection/step-by-step-self-examination.

The Academy of Dermatology offers free annual skin cancer screenings. For a list of locations in South Florida, visit aad.org.

Dr. Leslie Baumann, founder and CEO of Baumann Cosmetic and Research Institute and a Miami Herald columnist, offers some great tips for preventing skin cancer:

- Wear a broad-spectrum SPF of 15 every day on exposed areas, including arms and legs.
- Wear sun protective clothing when possible. Sun protective clothing is treated to fill in the holes between the threads so light does not get through. This is a good option for kids who often don’t get enough sun protection.
- Wear a hat! Multiple studies show a wide-brimmed hat is more effective than a baseball cap (although a baseball cap is better than nothing, especially for men with thinning hair).
- Take a protective oral supplement, such as Heliocare. It contains a fern extract known as polypodium leucotomos that has been shown to decrease damage from the sun and reduce redness after sun exposure.
- Load up on antioxidants before and after sun exposure. Antioxidants help mitigate some of the sun damage and protect the DNA of the cells. You can get antioxidants from fruits and vegetables, as well as beverages such as green tea, coffee and red wine. Topically, apply Vitamin C or green tea.

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