

Don't let the sun kiss you ... unless you say so

Keep your skin healthy over the summer by soaking in the sun on your own terms.

by Dana Leigh Smith, senior, health and wellness

photo by Jamie De Pould, grad student, photography

As the snow and ice begin to thaw, Syracuse University students flood the Quad and Walnut Park to bask in the sunlight, and bikini-clad girls seem to be everywhere enjoying the warm weather.

Many sunbathing students may think they are engaging in harmless outdoor fun, but they could be at risk for serious sunburn, which can lead to skin cancer.

Rates of skin cancer, the most common and preventable cancer in the United States, are increasing. Students tend not to use sunscreen, hoping to achieve a beautiful, bronze tan, but inadequate sun protection can lead to sunburn, which is not only unattractive and extremely painful; it can cause skin cancer.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 37 percent of U.S. adults reported having sunburn in 2004.

Julia Aubuchon, a senior broadcast journalism student and Florida native, is no stranger to sunburn. As a precaution, Aubuchon visited a dermatologist to ensure no cancerous growths had developed on her skin.

Her doctor suggested she have a few moles removed for examination. Thankfully for Aubuchon nothing came back cancerous or irregular, but her experience was anything but enjoyable.

"The doctor gave me a shot around the area to numb the pain, and cut the moles off with a laser," Aubuchon said. "The shots stung and the areas were tender. I know if they had been cancerous the procedure would have been a lot more invasive. The experience definitely made me more aware of realities of skin cancer."

Many college students

think they're invincible, and sometimes it takes an experience like Aubuchon's to start making healthy changes to prevent dangerous sun exposure.

Don't fret, sun worshippers! Staying safe doesn't have to mean hiding inside while everyone else is barbecuing and slip-and-sliding down Comstock.

Follow these sun safety tips, and you can spend less time deciding which sunscreen to buy, and more time outside enjoying the warm weather!

All sunburns are serious, or have the potential to be dangerous.

Sunburn and sun poisoning are the skin's allergic reaction to overexposure to the sun.

It not only increases the risk of skin cancer, but can lead to premature wrinkling and aging of the skin.

It's better to spend \$5 on a bottle of sunscreen than \$500 on anti-wrinkle

treatments.

Don't let a nasty burn become a summer bummer! To treat mild discomfort, stay hydrated, apply ice or cold compresses. Take a bath in cool—not cold—water to reduce swelling or itching. Aspirin is also a helpful remedy. Apply aloe, but avoid using additional oils or lotions containing fragrances or exfoliants.

Most importantly, stay out of the sun! If you suffer extreme pain, vomit or have a fever

over 104 degrees, go to the emergency room. A doctor can prescribe medications or suggest stronger forms of treatment.

To prevent sunburn and reduce the risk of skin cancer the Centers for Disease Control and The Skin Cancer Foundation suggest:

- Avoiding the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

- Wearing sun-protective clothing, UV-blocking sunglasses and a hat when outdoors

- Using sunscreen with a rating of SPF 15 or higher every day. Apply two tablespoons of sunscreen to your

entire body 30 minutes before going outside and reapply every two hours.

- Avoiding tanning and UV tanning booths

- Seeing your physician every year for a professional skin exam

Cutting-edge research indicates that a daily intake of supplemental beta-carotene can be helpful in preventing sunburns.

However, it takes at least 10 weeks to take effect, according to a 2008 meta-analysis by German scientists. For those who tend to burn easily, this could be a good prevention method in addition to other forms of protection.

So what exactly does SPF do and what kind of SPF is recommended?

SPF is an acronym for sun protection factor, and is the degree to which a sunscreen protects the skin from UVB rays, which cause sunburns. The SPF number does not refer to the UVA ray

protection, which is more closely linked to deeper skin damage and wrinkles.

SPF 15 means the sunscreen will protect your skin 15 times longer than if sunscreen was not used. SPF 15 blocks about 95 percent of UVB rays.

"It is logical for someone to think that an SPF of 30 is twice as good as an SPF of 15, and so on, but that is not how it works," said Florida dermatologist and American Academy of Dermatology spokesman Dr. James M. Spencer.

An SPF 30 product blocks 97 percent of UVB rays, and an SPF 45 product blocks about 98 percent of rays.

The way sunscreens are labeled can be confusing, and does not directly coincide with the level of protection.

If navigating through the sunscreen aisle wasn't already tricky, though, finding a sunscreen with effective UVA protection can be tough, but very important. Nearly all of the UV radiation that we are exposed to is UVA radiation.

The American Academy of Dermatology suggests using a "broad-spectrum" sunscreen to provide protection from both UVA and UVB rays.

Dermatologist Dr. Sonia Badreshia-Bansal recommends Neutrogena sunscreens with Helioplex and L'Oréal's LoRoché Posay with avobenzone.

For sunscreen to be most effective, apply liberally 30 minutes before going outdoors; reapply a water-resistant sunscreen every two hours, even on cloudy days and after swimming or sweating.

Spencer says SPF 15 sunscreens are fine if used correctly, but he recommends SPF 30 products to his patients because few people apply sunscreens as heavily or as often as they should.

healthy you | spring 2010 13

