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Sun Protection Recommendations

If you have had a skin cancer, precancers (actinic keratosis), or many atypical moles, then it is very important for you to practice sun safety and protect your skin. The sun damage that you have accumulated over the course of your lifetime will always be there and cannot be reversed, but there are many good studies that demonstrate that starting sunscreen use at any age can reduce further risk of skin cancer. The chance of developing an additional skin cancer within 5 years of the first skin cancer is 50%. Sun safety and sun protection can decrease your chances of developing further problems.

1. Sunscreen- If you are going to be outside for more than 20 or 30 minutes you should apply sunscreen of SPF number 30 or higher. Sunscreen only lasts 2-3 hours and should be reapplied every 2 hours if you are spending the day in the sun. Also sunscreen is not “waterproof” even if it says so on the bottle—if you go swimming you need to reapply sunscreen after you come out of the pool.
2. Protective Clothing- Wearing a broad-brimmed hat protects most of your face, ears, and neck. Keeping your shirt on also helps to protect your shoulders and back. Baseball hats only protect your forehead and a little of your lower face, so they aren't very good protection.
3. Daily Sunscreen Moisturizer- There are many very nice daily sunscreen moisturizers with SPF 30 available. They all rub in well and do not leave you with a greasy feeling like the thicker sunscreens. Using them on a daily basis all year round is a very good habit to get into. UVA light which is a major factor in causing skin cancer and aging of the skin is present all year round from morning to evening at a relatively constant level. UVA doesn't cause burning, so we commonly don't think about the damage it causes.

Most important of all be sure to live your life, do things that you want to, and be happy. We don't want people to avoid outdoor activities—just be smart and protect yourself when you are enjoying the outdoors. If you have had a skin cancer, pre-cancers, or atypical moles, then, in addition to your regular dermatologist check ups, be sure to check yourself on a monthly basis for spots that are growing, bleeding, getting a scab on them, or are changing in any way. Skin cancers are always easier to take off when they are little than when they are big.

If you have any further questions please give our office a call and we will be happy to do our best to help you.