

It's time to take skin cancer seriously

They can go from delightful to deadly without any warning. They come in all shapes and sizes and can sneak up in places you wouldn't expect. They are moles.

They seem harmless enough, but don't let them fool you. A mole can be a sign of skin cancer. According to the Canadian Dermatology Association, skin cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in Canada and around the world. This is partly because ultraviolet (UV) radiation is about 3-4 per cent higher today than it was before 1980. The reason for the increase is that our atmosphere's ozone layer is thinner than it was a few decades ago and therefore absorbs less UV radiation.

Health effects of UV exposure

Although cancer may be the most serious health problem caused by UV exposure, it's not the only one. Too much sun can also lead to premature aging and wrinkles, cataracts (a disease that damages your eyesight and can cause blindness), and a weakened immune system. Like skin cancer, the risk of developing these illnesses can be minimized if you limit your exposure to UV radiation from the sun.

Understanding the UV index

The amount of UV radiation that comes from the sun depends on the time of year and the time of day. One of the tools we can use to protect ourselves is the UV index. Ranging from 0 to 11, the UV index measures the intensity of the sun's UV rays. As the UV index increases, it's telling you that the sun's rays can do more harm to your skin, eyes, and immune system. For example, a UV index of 5 is considered moderate. An index of 8 is considered very high. The higher the index, the less time you should spend in the sun.

How to protect yourself

Because UV radiation is usually highest between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., most people should avoid outdoor activities between those hours. If you have to be outside during that time, here are some simple things you can do to protect yourself from radiation.

- Create shade in your work area. Sometimes a pop-up canopy can do the trick.
- If you have to work in direct sunlight, wear light-coloured, loose clothing. That will also help you stay cooler.
- If you wear a hard hat, consider a wide-brimmed style. It helps keep the sun off the face, neck, and ears.
- Use sunscreen. Don't forget to reapply it throughout the day. One application in the morning is not enough.
- Cover your skin with long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, and wide-brimmed hat. If it's hot outside, wear clothing made from light, breathable material to keep cool.
- If you drive a lot, remember to use sunscreen on your left arm to prevent a burn. Consider getting the vehicle windows tinted.
- If you have any indoor work to do, plan to do it between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. if possible.
- Wear eye protection that protects you from both UVA and UVB rays.

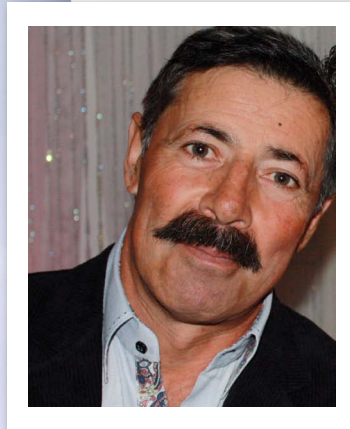
Although you won't see the effects right away, the sun's UV rays can seriously harm you. Make sure you address them in your health and safety policy and program as you would any other workplace hazard.

Choosing and using sunscreen

Using sunscreen is one of the best ways to protect yourself from harmful UV radiation. Here are some tips for choosing and using sunscreen.

- Pay attention to the SPF—sun protection factor. It represents the length of time that sunscreen-protected skin can be exposed to UVB rays before minimal redness occurs, compared to the length of time it takes for minimal redness to appear on unprotected skin. For example, if your skin would normally become red in 20 minutes, a sunscreen with SPF 15 would allow you to be in the sun 15 times as long (20 x 15 = 300 minutes) without your skin reacting.
- Health Canada recommends using a sunscreen with at least SPF 15. The Canadian Dermatology Association recommends SPF 30.
- There are different types of UV rays, so look for a “broad-spectrum” sunscreen. This will provide better protection against both UVA and UVB rays.
- Chemical-free sunscreens (which are called sunblocks) may be more suitable for people with sensitive skin or those who experience an allergic reaction to the chemicals found in most sunscreens.
- Most sunscreens should be applied to your skin 20 to 30 minutes before you go out in the sun. This gives the ingredients enough time to reach their protective levels.
- Apply the sunscreen evenly to all parts of your skin, including your ears, nose, and neck. Use about one palmful for each arm and leg.
- Remember to reapply sunscreen throughout the day. Sweat and water will wash it off. Always follow the instructions on the container.
- Use chapstick with at least SPF 15 to protect your lips, especially the lower lip.
- Never use expired sunscreen. After a certain length of time, the chemicals break down and will no longer protect your skin.

Remember that no sunscreen is 100 per cent effective. That’s why it’s important to use it along with long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, a hat, and sunglasses.



Skin cancer happens. **Ask Rudy.**

Rudy Cosentino probably has many reasons to thank his wife, but the most important is that she saved his life. A few months ago,

she noticed a scab on Rudy’s nose that didn’t seem quite right. It would heal, then come back, then heal and come back again. At his wife’s urging, Rudy decided to get it checked out; it turned out to be skin cancer.

Rudy is 56 years old and has been working in construction for about 30 years. In 1981, he and his business partners started Toronto Concrete and Drains. They work mostly on new residential construction in the Greater Toronto Area.

In addition to working outside for most of the day, Rudy spends a lot of time on the soccer field. Even though he spends so much time in the sun, Rudy used sunscreen only when he was on vacation. “I didn’t think about it day to day,” he said. “People who work in construction, we think we’re tough. We think we don’t need it.”

A few months ago, Rudy had the growth on the tip of his nose removed. “The skin is slowly growing back,” he said. He’s very thankful that he caught the cancer early and was able to get treatment. He still goes for regular checkups to have his condition monitored.

Now Rudy understands the importance of protecting himself from the sun. Following doctor’s orders, he applies sunscreen at least twice a day when he’s working outside, and he promotes sun protection to his workers. “The face and arms are probably the most exposed,” he says. “Owners should address this in their health and safety programs.”