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Does Sunshine Really Cause Skin Cancer?

Dermatologist Dr. Bernard Ackerman devotes many hours of his time diagnosing cases of cancer. On a recent trip, he didn't seem worried about the potential risk of the disease while he sunbathed without the use of sunscreen or a hat.



Ackerman, an expert in the field of dermatology, said that the connection between melanoma and the sun is both inconclusive and inconsistent.

Commonly Held Assumptions on the Sun and Melanoma

- If a person is badly sunburned, to the point of blistering at an early age in their life, they will develop skin cancer later on in life. Ackerman pointed out there were contradictions in the studies supporting this theory.
- Another common assumption is that sunscreen acts as a protection against melanoma. To counter this theory, Ackerman referred to a study completed in a dermatology journal on the subject that didn't provide any factual evidence to support this theory.

The more intense the exposure to the sun, the greater the likelihood of developing melanoma. Ackerman claimed that much of the epidemiological research is inaccurate and doesn't evaluate cause and effect findings.

Ackerman advised keeping out of the sun if you're concerned about premature aging or if you're very fair-skinned due to the increased risk of developing squamous cell carcinoma, a less dangerous form of cancer. Otherwise, Ackerman said it was not wise to hold onto the beliefs that included avoiding the sun and using sunscreen as ways to protect against melanoma.

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Ackerman further challenged the "epidemic" of melanoma by questioning why African Americans and Asians developed melanoma on their skin mainly on areas that haven't been exposed to the sun such as the palms, soles, nails and mucous membranes.

Another dermatologist who disagreed with Ackerman's ideas stated that people who developed melanoma in areas that weren't exposed to sun were a result of the way sunlight suppressed immune cells in the surface of the skin that normally kept cancer at bay.

Ackerman explained that this "immune-system argument" lacked evidence and acted as a hypothesis to the sun-exposure-causes-melanoma hypothesis.

[ContraCosta Times July 23, 2004](#) (Although registration info is required to review the original article, read [The Secret to Reading News on the Internet](#) for a time-saving, privacy-protecting workaround.)

Dr. Mercola's Comment:

Can sun exposure cause skin cancer? Absolutely. However, appropriate [sunlight actually prevents cancer](#). Exposure to the sun provides many benefits such as promoting the [formation of vitamin D](#). Most people are deficient in vitamin D, but if you decide to use vitamin D you will want to be very careful about [testing your levels](#) as it is easy to overdose.

We also have strong evidence that [sunlight protects against MS](#) and [breast cancer](#).

The key to proper sun exposure is to never burn.

Although the American Academy of Dermatology will have you bathing in sunscreen, it is one of the LAST things you want to put on your body. It is a toxic chemical that can cause problems in your system. But even if it didn't contribute to disease, the central issue is that it [doesn't even work](#).

A British dermatologist published an article, which showed [no clear indication that sunscreens worked](#). Another study in the Journal of Photochemistry and Photobiology found the same thing. A far more logical solution would be to [use clothing](#) to protect you against the sun.

So what is the cause of skin cancer and the deadly melanoma?

The true cause is the worsening [omega-3:6 ratios](#), not sunscreens. In 2001, the National Academy of Sciences published a comprehensive review showing that the omega-3:6 ratio was the key to preventing skin cancer development. Right now most Americans are eating far too many omega-6 fats and far too little omega-3.

An Australian study showed a 40 percent reduction in melanoma for those who were eating fish, which is rich in omega-3. And this was without any attention to lowering omega-6 fats.

This is one of the reasons why I highly recommend [routine consumption of fish oil](#) as a safe and effective way of increasing the omega-3 in your diet and improving your health. Fish oil contains high levels of the best omega-3 fats--those with the EPA and DHA fatty acids--and, as it is in pure form, does not pose the mercury risk of fresh fish.

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