

# Skin Cancer

*If you have skin, you're at risk*

## Staff Reports

Debbie Fine was a pre-med student looking forward to her sophomore year in college when she found out she had skin cancer. Debbie's younger sister, Stephanie, remembers the day the skin cancer was diagnosed.

"It was unbelievable," Stephanie said. "Debbie looked and felt fine, yet after one visit to the dermatologist she was given only two months to live."

At age 21, Debbie Fine died of malignant melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer. This year, the number of cases of melanoma is expected to reach 34,100; about one American an hour will die of the disease.

What Debbie and her sister didn't realize at the time was that Debbie's fair skin, unusual moles and family history of melanoma put her at high risk for developing the disease.

"As children, we spent most of our summers in the sun without adequate protection," Stephanie said. "At that time, we didn't know how dangerous it was. Now we know more and can take precautions to help prevent this awful disease. I've also learned what signs to look for and how to keep a watchful eye on my own skin."

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But skin cancer can be cured if detected early and - here's the best news - skin cancer is one of the easiest cancers to detect. By examining your skin from head to toe, you just might save your life.

Skin self-examination involves periodically looking over the skin for any changes in the size, color, shape or texture of a mole; the development of a new mole or any other unusual changes in the skin. Any of these signs should be reported immediately to a dermatologist or personal physician.

In addition to self-examination, the American Academy of Dermatology and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend the following precautions to reduce the risk of developing skin cancer:

- Avoid "peak" sunlight hours - 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. - when the sun's rays are most intense.

- Apply a sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15 about 15 to 30 minutes before going outdoors, and reapply it every two hours, especially when playing, gardening, swimming or doing other outdoor activities.

- Wear protective clothing, including a hat with a brim and long-sleeved shirt and pants, during prolonged periods of sun exposure.

"I used to love the look of a tan, but that was before I knew the consequences," Stephanie said. "I still like to spend time outdoors, but I'm smarter about it. I take steps to try to prevent what happened to my sister from happening to me or anyone else I care about."

# DANGER IN SUN THE SUN



# Tan Time

*Know the risks before taking on the sun*

## College Press Service

There are people who find the sun just too good to leave behind, and a Wake Forest University professor said it could be a deadly addiction.

"People know that, in the short run, our culture admires a tanned appearance," said Mark Leary, a professor of psychology at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, in an interview with "The Charlotte Observer." He recently completed his third study of diehard sunbathers.

"They may say, 'I know in the long run this is not good for me, but in the short run I am very motivated to be physically attractive and I am willing to go ahead and take the risk,'" Leary said.

Leary began his studies four years ago after noticing a friend's behavior at a conference in Nags Head. Even though the friend had a scar on her arm where she'd had skin cancer removed, she still spent hours on the beach and came to meetings with a sunburn.

"I know I'm supposed to stay out of the sun," he recalls her saying, "but I just can't stand how I look without a tan."

Leary's studies focused on Caucasians. He found that people concerned about making a good impression on others are at greater risk for skin cancer.

Those findings hit home for Linda Anderson.

Two years ago, she had a precancer-

ous lesion removed from her face. Two other spots on her neck and shoulder have been treated with cream. Her bronzed skin is drying out.

Still, Anderson continues to get all the sun she can at the beach and next to a pool.

"I know there are dangers," said Anderson, 43, the assistant fitness director at the Central YMCA in Charlotte. "I do it because it makes me feel a little healthier. It just makes me feel better."

"This kind of tanning is some kind of manifestation of obsessive-compulsive tendency," Leary said. "It's like they're tan insatiable."

Anderson works on her tan all year long, either outdoors or in tanning beds, but she says it's not out of concern for others' opinions.

"I get a lot of comments about how bad it is for you," she said. "I don't do it because of other people. My husband would love me if I was 50 pounds overweight and bald. A tan just makes me feel healthier."

In recent years, movie stars like Madonna and Kim Basinger have tried to bring back the allure of lily white skin, popular among women in the 19th century.

"If you had more and more highly attractive people of both genders making statements like that," Leary said, "it might move in the other direction."

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