sunscreen. However, at that point applying more sunscreen will not help; your skin will simply burn. Also, note that SPF 30 sunscreen offers only three percent more protection than SPF 15. Lastly, be sure to get new sunscreen every year. Its properties change over time, and it will become less effective.

• Avoid using tanning beds. They are just as damaging as the sun.

• Carefully protect children from sun damage. Two-thirds of skin damage will occur before age fifteen.

Avoiding excessive sun exposure and sunburn is the best way to protect yourself from sun damage and skin cancer. Routinely inspect your skin for any changes. If you suspect that a spot on your skin is new, or has changed color or appearance, consult a dermatologist. Ninety percent of all skin cancers can be cured if detected and treated in time, but practicing preventive techniques is the best way to avoid it altogether.
Many people describe sun-tanned skin as a "healthy tan", but nothing could be farther from the truth. There is no such thing as a safe tan!

Skin cancer attacks one out of every seven Americans each year, and one American dies from the disease every hour. Exposure to the sun causes over ninety percent of skin cancers in the United States.

Want to know more? This issue of Live Well, Work Well investigates the nature of sun damage and skin cancer, risk factors, and prevention tips.

Sun Damage

Any type of suntan constitutes sun damage caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. Other types of sun damage include wrinkles, age spots, freckles, tough or leathery skin, dilated blood vessels, sunburn, and skin cancer.

The sun emits two kinds of UV radiation: UVA, which causes aging, and UVB, which causes burning. Both UVA and UVB rays are undetectable to a person sitting in the sun—one cannot feel them on her skin—and both may be just as damaging on cool, cloudy days as they are on clear, sunny days. In addition, both types of radiation cause skin cancer.

Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the uncontrollable growth of abnormal cells in a layer of the skin. Over ninety percent of all skin cancers develop on skin that has been exposed to the sun, as sun damage builds up over the years and results in skin cancer.

The two most common types of skin cancer, basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma, are easily treated if caught early, and are rarely fatal. Basal cell carcinoma usually appears as a red patch, a shiny bump, or an open sore that does not heal. Squamous cell carcinoma usually arises as a scaly patch or a raised, wart-like growth.

The most dangerous form of skin cancer, malignant melanoma, looks like a mole-like patch with an irregular shape. Malignant melanoma is most often found on the legs of women, and on the trunks—especially the backs—of men.

Everyone has at least some risk of getting sun damage and skin cancer, because everyone is exposed to the sun. People are most susceptible when they are exposed to sudden, short bursts of sunlight while vacationing in places where the sun is very strong, such as locations near the equator or at very high altitudes.

The following characteristics place people at an even higher risk of developing skin cancer:

- A large number of moles;
- Red or blonde hair, blue eyes, fair skin, and freckles;
- Difficulty tanning, and skin that is easily burnt;
- A family history of skin cancer; and
- Taking medication that increases sun sensitivity.

Preventing Sun Damage

The easiest way to prevent skin damage and lessen your chances of getting skin cancer is to avoid getting sunburn. Here are a few tips to help keep you safe in the sun.

- Stay out of the sun between eleven o’clock a.m. and three o’clock p.m.
- Wear clothes with tightly woven fabric and a hat that shades your face, neck, and ears.
- Wear sunglasses whenever you are outside to avoid developing cataracts and damaging your retina.
- Use sunscreen that has at least SPF (sun protection factor) 15 protection. Apply it continually every day, especially on your lips. SPF 15 sunscreen allows you to stay outside fifteen times longer than without