



B.C. Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association

MEMBER UPDATE

ReFresh

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This week...

Let's Talk Skin Cancer Prevention

Truth be told, I frequently forget to put on sunscreen. Which is, in my situation, inexcusable since:

- Both my Dad and brother have had malignant melanoma growths removed;
- I spent many hours in the sun when I did my MBA in California; and
- Most summer evenings and weekends, all year round, find me outdoors, hiking, gardening, exercising the dog, etc.

I did not burn easy in the past, thanks to my Italian skin. However, now that we know the sun is hotter and more intense than it was when we were kids, my face is always protected – *that* I am smart about! And I figured that getting Vitamin D from the sun was much healthier than slopping on the chemicals.

Does any of this sound familiar to you?

Erin Hughes in our BCPVPA office came up with this week's topic and linked me to this great article (link to: <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/16/892062631/a-sunscreen-evangelist-explains->

[why-you-need-to-get-on-board](#)) – on why you should wear sunscreen. September can still be very warm with high UV index ratings. The article definitely made me think twice about going out in the sun ever again without protection.

Everyone – every skin color, every tone, every ethnicity – needs sunscreen for two main reasons: it prevents skin cancer, and it prevents premature aging.

Skin Cancer

No matter what your skin tone, dark or light, you can develop cancer. Cancer is caused by exposure to ultraviolet rays from the sun, and this raises the risk of all forms of skin cancer, including melanoma.

Some folks may respond: "I don't need it: my skin is too dark!" What is interesting is that the article states that even though fair-skinned folk are more prone to skin cancer, [the prognosis for skin cancers in non-white racial ethnic groups tend to be worse](#) as they are often diagnosed at a later stage.

If you develop a mole or an unusual freckle, or if you have a number of moles or spots on your skin, you should have these checked annually by either your physician or a dermatologist. Most of these blemishes will be harmless, but it is good to monitor them and quickly catch any usual growths. It's interesting that both my physician and a dermatologist told me that the moles we are born with are the ones to be watched most closely, as they have a higher probability of developing cancer – *who knew!*

It is best to use the 'ABCDE rule' to look for some of the common signs of [melanoma](#), which is one of deadliest forms of skin cancer

Asymmetry

One part of a mole or birthmark doesn't match the other.

Border

The edges are irregular, ragged, notched, or blurred.

Colour

The colour is not the same all over and may include shades of brown or black, sometimes with patches of pink, red, white, or blue.

Diameter

The spot is larger than ¼ inch across – about the size of a pencil eraser – although melanomas can sometimes be smaller than this.

Evolving

The mole is changing in size, shape, or color.

Not all forms of skin cancer look like these descriptions. Be sure to point out anything of concern to your doctor, including:

- Any new spots
- Any spot that doesn't look like others on your body
- Any sore that doesn't heal
- Redness or new swelling beyond the border of a mole
- Color that spreads from the border of a spot into surrounding skin
- Itching, pain, or tenderness in an area that doesn't go away, or goes away then comes back
- Changes in the surface of a mole: oozing, scaliness, bleeding, or the appearance of a lump or bump

Here are links to pictures to help you identify skin cancer:

<https://www.cancer.org/latest-news/how-to-spot-skin-cancer.html>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/melanoma/multimedia/melanoma/sls-20076095>

Pre-Mature Aging

If preventing cancer isn't reason enough to wear sunscreen, then I am sure that slowing your skin's aging process may be!

Sun exposure will cause wrinkles, brown spots, and photoaging. I had to look up what photoaging meant – and it was a little *shocking!*

Photoaging happens **when ultraviolet (UV) light hits skin unprotected by sunscreen, causing DNA changes at a cellular level**. Because photodamage happens in the deepest layers of the skin—the dermis—it can take years before the damage surfaces and becomes visible.

Unlike normal, chronological aging – which is dictated by age and genetics – photoaging happens when ultraviolet light from the sun and/or tanning beds permanently damages the skin's structure. To see the difference between chronological aging and photoaging, compare skin on an area of your body that is not exposed to the sun with the skin on your face.

Signs of photodamage can even begin in the teens to early twenties. Symptoms include the following:

- Wrinkling
- Pigmentation changes such as age spots, liver spots (solar lentigines), and freckles
- Loss of skin tone (decreased elasticity)
- Rough, uneven skin texture
- Broken capillaries (spider veins), usually around the nose and chest
- Redness and blotchiness

But What About the Chemicals?

When it comes to my own skin care, I try not to put anything on my face/skin that I would not eat because – let's face it – anything you put on your skin ends up in your blood stream, and the thought of sunscreen's chemical bath halts me in my tracks!

According to the article, there are two kinds of sunscreen:

Chemical sunscreen: If you're looking at the ingredient list, you'll see words like, avobenzone, oxybenzone, octinoxate, and octisalate. These sunscreens work by absorbing into the skin, converting UV rays into heat, and then releasing them from the body. They tend to feel a little better — they absorb better, they feel more moisturizing, they are cosmetically elegant. Recent studies indicate that these chemicals do build-up in the body over time. Based on animal studies, there are concerns of a disruption to endocrine systems, but there is no data yet to show harm to humans.

Mineral sunscreen: I learned that there is another kind of sunscreen you can choose. It's sometimes called 'physical' and sometimes called 'mineral': if you are looking at the bottle, the active ingredients to look for are titanium dioxide and/or zinc oxide. These form a physical layer on your skin; because these are literally physical blocks on your skin, they tend to be very hard to rub in, and can leave a whitish, or purple cast. However, we know these ingredients are safe, particularly for sensitive skin.

If you are still concerned about what you put on your skin, then a good alternative is to wear long sleeve shirts, pants, and hats. You can purchase clothing that specifically has UV protection. My own plan is to pick up a couple of shirts for hiking and gardening, and to increase my Vitamin D supplements. And, of course, don't forget your sunglasses ...



If you would like to contribute, or have ideas about what you would like to see in the [ReFresh](#) series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.

Sources:

- NPR | [A Sunscreen Evangelist Explains Why You Need To Get On Board](#)
- Yale Medicine | [Sun Damage](#)