

Sunshine- Friend or Foe by Vicki Holmes, MD June 8, 2015

Most of us by now are informed about sun and ultra violet rays and the damage it can do to our skin.

Skin cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer with 6,500 new cases of malignant melanoma and 76,100 non-melanoma skin cancers diagnosed in 2014 in Canada. In Saskatchewan last year we had 140 cases of melanoma diagnosed and 25 deaths.

The sun is especially strong between 11-4 pm or when the UV index is 3+. Avoiding the sun during that time or wearing sunscreen with SPF 30 can be helpful to prevent damage to our skin. Wearing sunglasses with UVA and UVB security is important.

A surprising report from Sweden has come out claiming that mortality rate for people who avoid the sun was two times higher than those in the highest sun exposure group. They followed 29,518 women for twenty years. At recruitment in 1990-1992 they were aged 25-64. Malignant melanoma incident is highest in Northern Europeans with fair skin, even higher for those with red hair and freckles. Ironically, those with low vitamin D levels have more aggressive tumors with shorter survival times! Although this study did not look at the specific causes of death, other studies have shown that those with the lowest vitamin D have increased osteoporosis; cancers of the colon, breast and prostate; heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, metabolic syndrome and diabetes, autoimmune diseases, Multiple Sclerosis, arthritis, depression, and psoriasis. The list goes on and on.

Some basic science studies have found that there are several forms of Vitamin D and one 1,25D3 may have a positive influence on our immune system and may inhibit photo damage by UV light.

This is a very exciting time in medicine where long held beliefs are being questioned. We are paying careful attention to what we do every day - being in the sun, eating and recognizing how important these things are to our overall health.

For now, get sun exposure in the morning and late afternoon. If you are out from 11-4pm, wear SPF 30 sunscreen, applying liberally and repeatedly if you are out for a long time. Know your family history and take more precautions if you are at higher risk.