

Sun Exposure and Skin Cancer

Whatever your skin type, exposure to the sun will gradually age your skin by destroying the supportive elastic and collagen fibers that give the skin its resilience and tone. Your skin will become leathery and wrinkled.

Sun damage is cumulative. It builds up over the years, from early childhood on. It does not take long periods of sun exposure to damage the skin. Brief increments of exposure will slowly but surely harm the skin as well.

Among the most serious effects of sun exposure are the developments of skin cancers. The most harmful of these are malignant melanomas. More common but less dangerous are basal and squamous cell carcinomas. These cancers are strongly linked to sun exposure and are most likely to effect people with fair skin who either never tan or tan poorly. However, even people who tan well can develop these melanomas if sun exposure occurs long enough and severely enough to impact the normal protection offered by skin pigment.

Protect yourself from the sun by using a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) rating of 15 or higher. Apply the sunscreen an hour before going out in the sun and reapply after swimming, heavy perspiration, or after you have been out a while. Cover every area that is exposed, including the neck, the backs of your hands and your ears. Remember, no sunscreen gives you absolute protection. If you stay in the sun long enough, you will still burn.

Put on sunscreen whenever you will be outdoors, even on cloudy or overcast days. The temperature of the air has no effect on the intensity of the sun. It may feel cooler, but just as many dangerous ultraviolet (UV) rays are hitting your skin, regardless of how hot it feels. In Georgia, UV rays are in the air year round.

Wearing a hat or sitting under an umbrella can help block most of the sun's rays, but some rays will be reflected off of surfaces, so a sunscreen is still called for. UV rays also can penetrate clear water and go right through wet clothing, so when swimming you are especially vulnerable, even when you cover up with a shirt.

UV rays are most intense between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. A simple way to evaluate the intensity of the sun is to look at your shadow. If your shadow is shorter than you are, UV activity is high.

MEDICAL, SURGICAL AND COSMETIC SPECIALISTS

Paula Nelson, M.D.
Felicity Warren, M.D.
Mary Ellen Luchetti, M.D.
Yvette George, M.D.
Cynthia A. Abbott, M.D.
George D. Miller, M.D.
John F. O'Brien, M.D.
Shelly M. Hall, M.D.
W. Harvey Cabaniss, Jr., M.D.
Keith R. Harris, M.D., M.P.H.
Wakitha Griffin, M.D.
James A. Rooney, M.D.

629 Beaver Ruin Road
Suite B
Lilburn, Georgia 30047
770-921-4300

2550 Windy Hill Road
Suite 103
Marietta, Georgia 30067
770-952-0050

970 Joe Frank Harris Parkway
Suite 330
Cartersville, Georgia 30120
770-382-2230

302 West 6th Street
Rome, Georgia 30165
706-291-0505

1150 Hammond Drive
Suite A-1120
Atlanta, Georgia 30328
770-392-1117

1010 Prince Avenue
Suite 186
Athens, Georgia 30606
706-549-7108

Fax 770-381-6451
www.myfamilyderm.com