Make your summer motto “slip, slap, slop.” Slip on a shirt, slap on a hat, and slop on plenty of sunscreen. Summer sun exposure cannot only make you uncomfortable, but can greatly increase your risk of skin cancer, the most common form of cancer affecting adults. And even though a tan may be flattering in the short term, in the long run, sun exposure also increases your likelihood of developing wrinkles.

By The Numbers
Cases of skin cancer are on the rise, and it’s not just because of better reporting methods. The most common type of skin cancer is basal cell carcinoma (car-sin-o-mah) with about 600,000 cases reported a year. There are another 400,000 reported cases of squamous (sqaw-muh) cell cancer, and 45,000 cases per year of the much more dangerous form of skin cancer, melanoma (mel-uh-no-muh). As with most forms of cancer, early detection and treatment is the key.

What To Watch For
Sun exposure is not the only risk—genetics play an important role. If you have a family history of any form of skin cancer—especially melanoma—increased detection diligence is critical. In addition to your annual skin exam, be aware of any “suspicious” skin growths or changes in preexisting moles. Changes to be particularly aware of are changes in size, an irregular shape, or changes in color. Moles that bleed easily should also be evaluated. Scaly spots that are slightly raised with a reddish background or irregular border, may be precancerous lesions. Ideally, these should be removed early.

Slip, Slap, Slop
Remember, make your motto, “slip, slap, slop” this summer. Your skin is the largest organ you have. Protect it with prevention.
SIX SUN SAFETY TIPS

1. **Limit Direct Sun Exposure During Midday**
   Ultraviolet rays are most intense during the middle of the day, usually between the hours of 10 AM and 4 PM. If you’re unsure about the sun’s intensity, take the shadow test: if your shadow is shorter than you, the sun’s rays are strongest. Plan activities out of the sun during these times. If you must be outdoors, protect your skin.

   UV rays can pass through water, so don’t assume you’re safe if you’re in the water and feeling cool. Be especially careful on the beach and in the snow because sand and snow reflect sunlight, increasing the amount of UV radiation you receive.

2. **Cover Up**
   When in the sun, keep covered! Wear clothing to protect as much skin as possible. Long-sleeved shirts, long pants, or long skirts are the most protective. Dark colors provide more protection than light colors. A tightly woven fabric protects better than loosely woven clothing. If you can see light through a fabric, UV rays can get through, too. Also, dry fabric is generally more protective than wet fabric.

3. **Wear A Hat**
   A hat with at least a 2- to 3-inch brim all around is ideal because it protects areas often exposed to the sun, such as the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp. A shade cap (which looks like a baseball cap with about 7 inches of fabric draping down the sides and back) also is good. These are often sold in sports and outdoor supply stores.
   
   A baseball cap can protect the front and top of the head but not the back of the neck or the ears, where skin cancers commonly develop.

4. **Use A Sunscreen With A Sun Protection Factor Of 15 Or Higher—Regularly And Properly**
   Experts recommend products with an SPF of at least 15. The SPF number represents the level of sunburn protection provided by the sunscreen—a higher number means more protection.
   
   It is important to remember that sunscreen does not give you total protection. When using an SPF 15 and applying it correctly, you get the equivalent of 1 minute of burning UV rays for each 15 minutes you spend in the sun. So, 8 hours in the sun wearing SPF 15 sunscreen is the same as spending 32 minutes unprotected.

   Be sure to apply the sunscreen properly. Always follow the manufacturer’s directions. Most recommend applying sunscreen generously to dry skin 20 to 30 minutes before going outside so the chemicals have time to absorb into your skin. When applying it, pay particular attention to your face, ears, hands, and arms, and generously coat the skin that is not covered by clothing. If you’re wearing insect repellant or makeup, sunscreen should be applied before those products.

   Use sunscreen lip balm.

   Do not use sunscreens on babies younger than 6 months. Instead, use hats, clothing, and shading to protect small babies from the sun.

   Sunless tanning products, such as bronzers and extenders, give skin a golden color. Unlike sunscreens, these products do not protect you from UV damage.

5. **Wear Sunglasses That Block UV Rays**
   The ideal sunglasses do not have to be expensive, but they should block 99% to 100% of UVA and UVB radiation. Check the label to be sure they do. Some labels may say, “UV absorption up to 400 nm.” This is the same as 100% UV absorption. Also, labels that say “special purpose” or “Meets ANSI UV Requirements” mean the glasses block at least 99% of UV rays. Those labeled “cosmetic” block about 70% of the UV rays. If there is no label, don’t buy the sunglasses.

6. **Avoid Tanning Beds And Sunlamps**
   Many people believe that the UV rays of tanning beds are harmless. This is not true. Tanning lamps give out UVA and frequently UVB as well. Both UVA and UVB can cause serious skin damage, and both contribute to skin cancer growth. Because of these dangers, health experts advise people to avoid sunlamps and tanning beds.

The above tips were taken from the American Cancer Society’s website. You can find out more about Skin Cancer and how you can prevent it by visiting www.cancer.org.