



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

# MELANOMA: CAUSES AND PREVENTION

**Melanoma is one of the fastest-growing cancers worldwide, especially in young women under 30. However, most melanoma is curable in its early stages. The sun's rays that nourish and energize the human body are unfortunately also a main cause of melanoma. It is important to learn what you can do to protect yourself and decrease your risk of skin cancers, including melanoma.**



## CAUSES OF MELANOMA

**Ultraviolet Rays.** Most skin cancers are caused by too much exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. The two types of UV rays that cause melanoma are UV-A and UV-B rays. UV-A rays are fairly constant throughout the year, and contribute to aging and wrinkling of the skin. UV-B rays, stronger than UV-A rays, are more intense in the summer months and are the most common cause of sunburn. The longer you are out in the sun, the more UV radiation you receive. A blistering sunburn at an early age can double a person's chance of developing melanoma later in life.

**Tanning Beds.** Tanning beds emit UV rays to speed up the skin tanning process, which has made them especially popular with young people. However, exposure to tanning beds before age 30 increases a person's risk of developing melanoma. Younger people who regularly use tanning beds are eight times more likely to develop melanoma than people who have never used them. Even occasional use of tanning beds by people under 30 increases the chances of developing melanoma.

## PROTECT YOUR SKIN

Here are some easy ways to help protect your skin from UV rays and reduce your risk of melanoma:

**Wear sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher.** If you have fair skin or light hair, you are more susceptible to the sun's rays and should use a sunscreen with a higher SPF.

**Reapply sunscreen often**—usually every two hours, but sooner if you've been swimming or are perspiring heavily.

**Cover your whole body.** Remember those areas that can be easy to forget, such as your ears, eyelids, lips, nose, hands, feet, and the top of your head.

**Choose sunscreen labeled "broad spectrum,"** meaning that it protects against both types of harmful rays: UV-A and UV-B.

**Avoid tanning salons,** as exposure to ultraviolet radiation increases your risk of melanoma.

(over)

**Wear sunglasses that provide 100% UV protection** to safeguard your eyes.

**Seek shade or avoid the sun during the peak hours of 10 a.m. — 4 p.m.** The sun is strongest during those hours, even on cloudy days.

**Use extra caution near water, snow and sand,** as they reflect the damaging rays of the sun, which can increase your chance of sunburn.

**Wear a hat with a wide brim** to help shade your eyes, ears and head.

**Wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothing such as long-sleeve shirts or long pants that protect a larger area of your skin.** Tightly woven fabrics in dark or bright colors are best.

### **MELANOMA SUPPORT**

Have you or a loved one been diagnosed with melanoma? Call the Melanoma Helpline at 1-877-MRF-6460 (1-877-673-6460) for reliable information, emotional support and helpful resources. The helpline is a partnership of CancerCare and the Melanoma Research Foundation ([www.melanoma.org](http://www.melanoma.org)).



### **CancerCare® Can Help**

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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