

Health Beat

Avoid Sun Exposure for Health and Beauty



Mark Morgan, M.D., FACS

For decades many people considered suntanned skin to be synonymous with health and beauty. In both cases, however, it promotes just the opposite.

Sun exposure is not only the biggest contributor to premature aging, it is the

leading cause of the most common type of cancer in the United States: skin cancer. This connection has led Wilmington Plastic Surgery to offer free skin evaluations to the public from time to time.

"It's a way for us to give back to our community," said Mark Morgan, M.D., FACS. "As with most cancers, early detection of skin cancer is extremely important for successful treatment."

There are three types of skin cancers: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and malignant melanoma. While all can spread and need to be treated, melanoma is by far the most serious, accounting for more than 8,100 deaths in the United States in 2007, compared to 2,700 from non-melanomas. Periodic skin evaluations are crucial for catching all types of skin cancer. Screening by a plastic surgeon has the added benefit of providing a continuity of care for those who are also concerned with the aesthetics of sun damage.

"Many people who want to be checked for suspicious moles also want to learn about their options for improving their skin's overall appearance," said Dr. Morgan. "Fortunately, there are numerous products and procedures available to help with both."

GOOD MEDICINE

Among the most important developments in the past couple of decades is a topical medication called Aldara that successfully treats 80% of basal cell skin cancers without surgery.

"It's been around for awhile, but it hasn't been heavily publicized," said Dr. Morgan. "People need to know about it. Aldara has allowed us to save the noses and ears of so many farmers and fisherman and others who are out in the sun a lot." Dr. Morgan said it is definitely worth trying the medication as the first approach. "Then, if surgery is needed, it is often much less invasive than it would have been without use of the medication," he said.

Squamous cell carcinoma is often treated by surgical excision or radiation, and treatment of melanoma depends on the stage of disease, but may involve surgery, chemotherapy, radiation and/or biologic therapy. When surgery is involved, many patients prefer to have a plastic surgeon remove cancerous lesions for cosmetic reasons.

Efudex, another topical medication widely used by dermatologists and plastic surgeons, is not as powerful as Aldara, but is highly effective on precancers.

BEAUTY:

Skin Deep and Beyond

For those who have not been prudent with sun exposure, yet are fortunate enough to have escaped serious medical consequences, options also exist for dealing with purely aesthetic skin damage—from topical treatments to surgical solutions. Convenient for Brunswick County residents, Wilmington Plastic Surgery has recently opened an office in the Waterford medical complex, offering a range of skin rejuvenation services onsite, as well as consultations for all types of cosmetic and reconstructive procedures—including the revolutionary new Smartlipo™, a minimally invasive

laser-assisted liposculpting technique that helps eliminate bumps and bulges with virtually no downtime. Smartlipo is available locally only at Wilmington Plastic Surgery.

Skin rejuvenation options offered through WPS include wrinkle-smoothing and line-reducing injections, such as BOTOX®, Juvederm™, Restlyane®, Artefill® and Radiesse®. Advanced laser technology is highly effective at tightening the skin, as well as erasing or minimizing skin discolorations and imperfections, and chemical peels that exfoliate the outer layers of the skin also produce excellent rejuvenation results.

Additionally, Wilmington Plastic Surgery's Landfall location houses a full-service Laser & Skin Care Center that not only offers the full complement of services, it carries many of the industry's most noted skin care products.

"Because we live at the beach, we see more sun damage than other areas of the state," said Dr. Morgan. "People are becoming more aware and starting to be smarter about sun exposure. Prevention is always the first and best line of defense." ■

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