

Senior Scene



Skin cancer prevention for seniors

Wisdom and age frequently go hand in hand. But when it comes to knowledge of the latest medical advancements, some older adults may not be up-to-date.

Medical recommendations evolve over time. After all, it wasn't too long ago people were told to avoid foods containing high amounts of dietary cholesterol because it would raise their own blood cholesterol levels. Now MedlinePlus says the general consensus is that eating dietary cholesterol has a minimal impact on blood cholesterol for most people. And people in their 70s may have raised children thinking it was fine to lay the child in the crib on the baby's stomach. Now the advice is "back is best."

Medical professionals now know that exposure to ultraviolet rays of the sun and tanning beds can contribute to the development of skin cancer. But just a few generations ago people were slathering on baby oil and using suntan reflectors to accelerate tanning. The risk of skin cancer is raised for those who have had cumulative exposure to the sun. So it is essential that

seniors practice sun safety every day so they are not adding to the damage that already may have occurred. It's also foolish to think, "I've made it this long without skin cancer, and it takes decades to develop, so I'm never going to get it."

No one knows how long they will live and it's important to take care of oneself to live as strong, healthy and long as possible. To that end, seniors can employ these sun safety tips, courtesy of the Skin Cancer Foundation.

- Learn the facts. Suffering just five sunburns over your lifetime more than doubles your chances of developing melanoma, and each successive tan or sunburn raises the risk even further. Suntans damage the skin's DNA and age it before its time. Also, skin undergoes changes that reduce defenses against disease and healing. One bad burn as a senior may be the final straw.

- Use sunscreen. Sunscreen may not have been widely used when today's seniors were young. Just because that was the norm then doesn't mean things can't change now. It's never too late to reduce your skin cancer risk by lath-

ering on sunscreen daily — even when the sun doesn't seem particularly strong. Seniors should look for a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 for daily use.

- Wear protective clothing. Choose tightly woven, long-

sleeved shirts, long pants, and wide-brimmed hats to protect you. You can purchase clothing that has sun protection built right in.

- Avoid being outside during certain times of day. Stay out of the sun when it is at its peak. Radi-

ation is typically the strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. That's when the risk for skin damage is highest, says the American Cancer Society.

- Seek shade. When spending time outdoors, seek shady spots, wheth-

er you're under an umbrella or in tree-lined areas.

Sun safety for seniors is generally the same for people of all ages. But it becomes a more urgent necessity due to cumulative sun exposure that comes with age.

Can cataracts be prevented?

Vision should be cherished at every stage in life. However, as one ages and vision changes become more profound, it is even more important to stay abreast of what can be done to care for the eyes in the hopes of preventing certain conditions, including cataracts.

Cataracts are the clouding of the eye's natural lenses. The World Health Organization estimates that cataracts affect more than 94 million people globally. Cataracts also account for nearly 45 percent of all blindness cases.

Even though cataracts are considered an unavoidable part of the aging process, some people wonder if they can be prevented. Reedsburg Area Medical Center says that, while one cannot

entirely stop the biological aging of the lens, delayed onset and reduced severity of cataracts is possible through targeted lifestyle choices.

According to EyeHealth Northwest, by age 80, more than 90 percent of adults will either have a cataract or have already undergone surgery for them. Technically cataracts cannot be prevented, but these steps can help push cataract development further into later life.

- Wear sunglasses with UV protection. The consensus among experts is that prolonged exposure to ultraviolet B rays accelerates the breakdown of lens proteins. Consistent use of sunglasses that offer 100 percent UV protection can greatly slow this protein degradation. Wrap-

around frames will block light from the periphery as well as the front.

- Lower oxidative stress. Preventing oxidative stress, a primary driver of lens opacification, can be achieved through diets rich in antioxidants, says Premier Eye Care of Eastern Idaho. Lutein, zeaxanthin and vitamin C act as shields for the eye. Eye Physicians of Long Beach says the risk of age-related cataracts reduces by around 26 percent for every additional 10 mg of carotenoids added to a person's diet.

- Manage diabetes. The National Institutes of Health says individuals with diabetes face a 63 percent higher likelihood of

requiring cataract surgery compared to those without the condition. Managing high blood sugar will prevent sorbitol from depositing in the lenses and causing cloudiness earlier in life.

- Quit smoking: Smoking is a key factor in cataract development, says Optometrists.org. Smokers have a 1.66 times greater risk of developing cataracts than non-smokers because the toxins in tobacco smoke can deplete the body's natural antioxidant stores.

Although it may not be possible to turn off aging and prevent cataracts entirely, cataracts can be delayed and made less impactful through lifestyle changes.



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