

THE SENTINEL

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4, 2014



Take pains to protect skin, or your skin will be in pain

By **ALEXANDRA CANAL**
Special to the Sentinel

As the summer season finally makes its way past the cold, rain and snow, beachgoers from all over the country flock to New Jersey in order to get a taste of what the real Jersey shore has to offer.



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Still, no matter where you are traveling from, it can be easy to forget about the simple rules of the beach, as well as the damage and dangers of the sun.

Dr. Joseph Hong, a dermatologist from the Atlantic Dermatology and Laser Center based in Linwood, sees many patients who have experienced skin damage from the sun's harmful rays.

"The biggest issue I see is ignorance of sun danger. People think a healthy tan is good for you, which is not entirely accurate," Hong said.

Although vitamin D is an essential element of the body and is acquired by sun exposure, it is often better to supplement vitamin D with diet pills and food nutrients rather than basking in the sun.

"Skin cancer is the No. 1 cancer in the U.S. today," Hong said. "One-third of people will have skin cancer in their lifetime. That risk is much more dangerous than attempting to reach efficient levels of vitamin D."

Although sunscreens provide a

sense of protection to those who enjoy their toes in the sand, Hong says that unless people are applying enough of it, sunscreen does little to fully protect the skin.

"When people apply sunscreen, they are supposed to apply two micrograms per square centimeter onto their skin. That is about a shot glass worth of sunscreen," Hong said. "In reality, people are only applying 0.4 micrograms per square centimeter, which is about one-quarter of their SPF."

In other words, the main issue with sunscreen lies within the hands of the users, who do not seem to place a heavy emphasis on lathering up. Instead of receiving the full coverage that is advertised, that SPF 15 has now turned into SPF 2 or 3.

"I always say that an SPF 15 sunscreen should work as well as a good, white T-shirt. So if someone is experiencing tan lines when they are wearing a T-shirt, that means that they did not put enough sunscreen onto their skin. I always consider that a pretty good gauge," Hong said.

A sunscreen with SPF 15 has been tested and proved to have 94 percent blockage against the sun's ultraviolet rays. SPF 30, on the other hand, contributes to 97 percent blockage. Yet, regardless of what SPF you choose, Hong says that it is always important to keep some other tips in mind:

— Sensibility in the sun: "Just be smart when you go outside. For example, if you are going for a jog, jog at night or in the early morning when the sun's rays are not as harmful."

— Adequate protection: "Clothing serves as a very good SPF protectant and can often do the work of a sunscreen."

— Lather up: "Sunscreens can prevent sunburns if used properly. Although this is not my first suggestion, it is always good to use as long as you keep reapplying and use a sufficient amount."

While taking extra steps to prevent sunburns and skin damage may seem tedious and unnecessary, the benefits of healthy and cancer-free skin surpass the hassle of squeezing out just a little more sunscreen from that bottle. Keep Hong's tips in mind next time you are out in the sun, and maybe, just maybe, you can leave the aloe at CVS.

Beach etiquette tip of the week

The sandy towel: Before you go shake out that towel in the middle of a packed beach, remember the people and families around you.

Although it would be nice to lounge without the extra sand sticking to your fresh-out-of-the-ocean bathing suit, remember that there is always a little wind swirling around the beaches.

It only takes one grain of sand to fly into the eyes of a stressed-out mother or roaming toddler, so be aware of your surroundings.

Instead of shaking out that towel in your convenient beach spot, try dragging it near the dunes where the crowd is typically sparse. Trust me, everyone around you will be grateful for the sand-free eyes!

Alexandra Canal is a journalism student at Georgetown University and Little Miss Ocean City 2006. She has spent 20 years on the beach here in Ocean City.