

CANCER ANSWER LINE American Cancer Society
M. D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute

High rate of skin cancer avoidable, specialist says

Whether you work outdoors for a living or simply enjoy weekends in the sun, by taking simple precautions and using good judgment you can often prevent needless occurrences of skin cancer, says a Texas cancer specialist.

According to Dr. Don A. Gard, a surgeon at M. D. Anderson Hospital in Houston, while scientists may not know all causes of skin cancer, ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun remain the best guess.

Presently, superficial skin cancer, the type attributed to overexposure to the sun, is the most common form of cancer in the United States. Between 300,000 and 600,000 cases occur annually, according to American Cancer Society estimates. Studies also show that the incidence of skin cancer is significantly higher in the South where exposure to the sun is greatest.

Although skin cancer may be the most common form of cancer, it is also the most effectively treated with a cure rate of about 95 percent. Most experts agree that those figures could approach almost 100 percent if patients would seek proper medical attention earlier.

"It's not a single exposure to the sun but repeated damage to the skin by UV rays that seems to cause most skin cancer," says Dr. Gard. "While most of the patients we see have been exposed to the sun over many years, there are exceptions where people with limited sun exposure develop skin cancer — thus implicating heredity as another possible cause."

It is known that people with fair complexions are more susceptible to skin cancer because their skin lacks sufficient quantities of melanin, the pigment substances which filter out the sun's harmful rays.

When skin is exposed to the sun, ultraviolet rays stimulate these pigment cells to increase their production of melanin creating the darkening known as "tan". Thus, a

fair-complexioned farmer who has little protective melanin and prolonged sunlight exposure would be at a particularly high risk.

What can you do to protect yourself?

"While most of the patients we see cannot really alter their lifestyles," says Dr. Gard, "they can be aware of the high risk light-complexioned persons have. If they have previously had skin cancer or if they are at a high risk, they should periodically have a physician or skin specialist check for changes in the skin's condition."

Also, he adds, everyone can cover the skin when outdoors by wearing wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeve shirts and using a good sunscreen agent, which a pharmacist can recommend.

If an abnormal skin condition appears, such as a scaly skin thickening in a small area (usually on the face, neck or hands), see your doctor, urges Dr. Gard. In many cases this scalliness may be a noncancerous condition known as actinic keratosis which, while easily treated, can become cancerous if ignored.

Other characteristic signs of skin cancer include pale, waxy, pearly nodules which may eventually ulcerate and crust, or red scaly, sharply outlined patches, he notes.

Ignoring skin cancer symptoms can be dangerous. Left untreated it may become aggressive, warns Dr. Gard, penetrating below the skin to bone and eventually other parts of the body where treatment becomes more difficult and the outlook for cure decreases.

NEXT: Treating Skin Cancer

Do you have further questions? Call your local unit of the American Cancer Society or write: Cancer Information Service, The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Hospital & Tumor Institute, Texas Medical Center, Houston, 77030.

Grad student wins five-mile run

John Crompton headed the pack from start to finish in the Brazos Valley Joggers Club's five-mile open run.

The 31-year-old Texas A&M graduate student toured the Kyle Field-West Bypass course in 29:44 despite the warm humid weekend weather.

David Barrow, 31, and Rusty Rush, 38, dueled for runner-up honors, with Barrow crossing the finish line in 33:29, nipping Rush by six seconds.

Other participants and their times: Bradley Kohls, 33:51; Don Kirby, 34:16; David Allen, 34:59; Ron Wallace, 35:32; Howard Shertzer, 36:33; Tish Husak, 36:34; Bill

Tummins, 39:53; Ed Reyna, 40:10; Michael Terry, 43:47; Jerry Heberstreit, 44:23; and Jennifer Rush and Lyn Reyna, 47:44.

Warren Brown, 12, posted the fastest time in the club's traditional one-mile "fun run," with a 6:23. David Reyna was timed at 6:45 and Mary Ann Wallace, 9:21.

The BVJC's next outing will be at 5 p.m. Saturday, June 19, for a six-mile handicap run over its Brazos River course.

Course cuts car insurance

AUSTIN — Texas motorists interested in lowering their automobile insurance premiums have an easy solution to this budget problem.

They can complete an eight-hour classroom course in defensive driving and earn a 10 percent discount on their insurance premiums.

Since September of 1972 the State Board of Insurance has granted a 10 percent reduction in car insurance rates for three years following completion of the course. Joe Christie, Chairman of the Insurance Board, said the Board granted reduction because national figures show the course cuts down on accidents.

Christie says Insurance Board figures show that the average Texas driver saves between \$17 and \$32 annually for each of the three years after completing the Defensive Driving Course. Last year more than 100,000 Texas motorists completed the Defensive Driving Course of the National Safety Council in a program coordinated by the Texas Safety Association.

At the same time, insurance companies nationwide lost \$300

million, with the biggest losses in automobile insurance lines. The 1975 experience is leading automobile insurance firms to seek relief from these losses, and Texas insurance companies have served notice they will request a new hike in automobile insurance rates when the Insurance Board meets in July.

This means that auto insurance may be harder to get in the future, especially for those with poor traffic records, and cost more for everyone.

Christie recommends that people interested in keeping their auto insurance rates in line complete a Defensive Driving Course, and repeat it if a driver took it initially before September 1972.

The Defensive Driving Course concentrates on driver motivation, positive driving habits, and anticipating the incorrect actions of others and adverse operating conditions, including weather, mechanical or personal impairment.

To sign up for a Defensive Driving Course, contact the Texas Safety Association, Box 9345, Austin, 78766, or phone 512/451-7421.

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