

Safety in the sun

Skin cancer is deadly and on the rise; protect yourself this summer

Lydia Bashaw

The Clackamas Print

Bacon: thick, pale slices of meat that smell so good when cooked. Drop them in a heated pan and watch them brown and get crispy.

This deliciously dangerous food reacts the same way to heat as human skin – it gets darker and dries out. Just like bacon, which ends its life shortly



Internet Photos

after being cooked, too much sun on bare skin can end your life.

With the summer months here, the sun is getting more dangerous every day.

“People fail to realize the dangers the sun has on skin,” said Doctor John Antolik, a family physician. “Skin cancer has become one of the most common cancers today. It’s a very serious problem.”

The most common cause of skin cancer is excessive exposure to the sun. Ultraviolet rays (UVR) cannot be felt on the skin and penetrate deep into our cells, causing changes that lead to skin cancer, skin ageing, sunburns and eye damage.

Even if you have dark skin, UVR can affect you. The sun does not have to be particularly hot to hurt your skin; in fact, it is most intense during midday.

The best way to save your skin from frying is to wear sunscreen. It may be a hassle, but sunscreen could ultimately save you a lot of pain and suffering later. Applying sunscreen 20 minutes before you go outside and reapplying often will help protect you.

“Everyone needs to wear sun-

screen, especially May through August,” said Antolik. “Skin cancer is a killer, and we need to be more aware of that.”

Buy sunscreen that is SPF 15 or higher and also broad-spectrum, which protects against different types of sunrays. Apply liberally, and make sure that all children and babies are well-protected. To be safe, use shade whenever possible. Trees and umbrellas give your skin a rest from the destructive heat.



The most important thing to remember is that skin cancer is real. Tanning beds and the sun are the leading causes of skin cancer deaths, including melanoma. Check your skin often, and look for unusual moles and marks. Be sure to contact a doctor if something is out of the ordinary.

Doctor Antolik’s piece of advice: “Don’t believe you are invincible. It affects everyone, from black skin to the palest white. You can get skin cancer. Cover up with sunscreen or clothing. It could save your life.”

Fashionable tan leads to silent killer

Lydia Bashaw

The Clackamas Print

Clackamas resident Misty Hammond appears to have the perfect life. She is expecting her first child in February and is getting married in two weeks.

But the doctors say she is dying. The killer? The sun.

“When I was young, the sun didn’t scare me,” said Hammond. “I have dark skin, dark hair and dark eyes. Who would have thought that I would be the one to get cancer?”

Hammond, 23, was an addicted tanner for eight years – she used to spend several days a week inside the tanning bed or out in the sun. Today, she has

Lentigo Maligna Melanoma, a form of skin cancer. Inside her home, there are pamphlets spread across the dining room table: *Living with Melanoma, Dealing with Cancer, How to Live Through Cancer.*

She knows very well why she has cancer. Pulling her knees underneath her, she explained the lure of the sun, the desire to fit into a world with high expectations about looks amongst her and other young women.

“Back then, we all thought having a tan was sexy; now, I see it as a deadly attraction,” said Hammond. “We all think that without that extra color on our legs and arms that we aren’t pretty. We think that we have to have the same tan as Jennifer Aniston, but we never realize the consequences of following our stupid expectations about body image.”

With lovely dark hair and an olive skin tone, Hammond could pass for a movie star. She does not seem like the type doctors would warn about the sun. In fact, she is the opposite of the pale, freckled girls who are often cautioned to wear sunscreen, but she knows firsthand that the sun does not discriminate.

“I wish someone would have told me that skin cancer is possible for everyone,” she said. “I don’t get the chance to fix this. There are no second chances.”

But Hammond is trying to make a difference by increasing the awareness of skin cancer, especially among her friends and family. Next to the doorway of the apartment she shares with her fiancé is a bottle of Coppertone SPF 40.

“I won’t let anyone leave the house without applying some to their bare skin,” she said. “It’s become an obsession. When I have my baby, the first thing it will learn is the importance of listening. Doctors don’t lie to us; they mean it when they say something is bad for us.”

Hammond was diagnosed with advanced melanoma three months ago. Her first child, a girl, is due near the end of February 2008.

Lentigo Maligna Melanoma carries a death rate of 70 percent, giving one in three a chance of living five years.



Photo contributed by Tiffany Har

Hammond and fiancé Adamson share a tender moment. Hammond has a chance of surviving her cancer.

For Hammond, the cancer was caught too late. Doctors tell her there are no treatments available to save her. Holding hands with her fiancé Greg Adamson, she shares the truth about her disease.

“This disease that I have to go to take my life,” said Hammond. “I may not live to see my baby go to her first of school. I may not live to see her graduate or get married – and it’s my own fault.”

According to the American Cancer Society, over 80,000 people die a year from melanoma, more than half of them women. In 2006, 59 thousand people were diagnosed with melanoma, a 1 percent increase from 1990. The dangers of skin cancer are rising.

“I wish I could tell everyone I meet that the sun is a killer,” said Hammond. “I wish every person could know the real dangers. It’s slowly holding on my life, and I continue to do so. There’s no way to curb the sun. It’s not possible; we have to take it into our own hands.”

With three weeks until her wedding, Hammond and Adamson struggle to make decisions about the future. Who should give the speech at their rehearsal dinner? What should they name their baby? Should they have a bigger place with a pool on the way?

The one question doesn’t come up: Is this cancer going to ruin our lives?

“We have decided to move forward. We are putting our energy towards this marriage and this child,” said Adamson. “I love Misty with my whole heart. Wherever this cancer takes her, I will be there.”

Hammond knows that she cannot save her from the cancer in her body. She knows that she will be lucky to live more than a few years without treatment, which she does not want to go through because of her concerns about the effect on her child.

“The hard truth is that at the end, I’m not going to live with cancer. It’s not possible, can live my life happily,” said Hammond. “I just wish more people would listen to the warnings. I would never wish this on anyone. Skin cancer is real.”

Summertime and the swimming’s easy; just be careful about it

Andrea Simpson

The Clackamas Print

The last time I went to the beach, Pamela Anderson did not run out and save me from sinking to a watery grave – nor did David Hasselhoff, for that matter.

This summer, many people will enjoy going swimming in the ocean and the various lakes and rivers in Oregon. But before you dive in, read up on your swimming safety.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, in 2004 there were 3,308 unintentional drownings in the United States. That averages nine people a day.

There are many things you can do to prevent accidents while in the water.

This may sound obvious, but never swim alone. You may think you are the best swimmer in the world, but you never know when you will need the help of others. The buddy system is the number one way to stay safe.

Never dive in after someone who is drowning. Many people drown within feet of safety. Practice the “Reach, Throw, Row, Don’t Go” method. Reach first with a pole or stick and instruct the victim to grab hold.

If that doesn’t work, scan the area for milk jugs or an empty cooler that can be thrown in and used as a buoy.

If there happens to be a boat nearby, row your way out to them. Never approach a swimmer with the motor of the boat on. Unless you are trained in lifeguard techniques, you should never enter the water to save someone.

When swimming in the ocean, everyone should be aware of riptides. Riptides are retreating waves that tend to have an extremely strong pull. If you feel yourself being sucked out by a riptide, the best thing you can do is swim parallel to shore until you don’t feel the tug of the tide anymore. Do not swim toward shore. This takes a great deal of energy and isn’t very effective.

Educating yourself on how to swim is probably one of the most effective ways to prevent an accident. The American Red Cross offers swimming classes, as do most pools in the area. If you can be trained as a lifeguard, even better. Then, you can assist saving someone else.

This summer, there is no need to stay out of the water – as long as you take these life-saving precautions into consideration.

