

Ahh...the joys of summer!

Here's to the days where you don skimp on clothes, head outdoors & soak up the rays... Get that sun-kissed look.

Summertime means picnics, boating, bike rides, golf ... and lots more outdoor fun in the sun.

Yes, It's all fun and games ...

until you get a sunburn. **Ouch!**

In just a few weeks, we'll be partying by the pool. Let's hope the weather forecast won't be: Cloudy with a chance of cancer.

Although the summer sun is your friend – it's also your foe!

Here's how I know.

Take a look at my skin. I didn't inherit my dad's red hair, but I got his fair skin and freckles.

This is the most at risk skin type for sunburn and skin cancer.

I know, because I've suffered both.

Learn from my mistakes and be sun-smart and sunscreen savvy.

Because skin cancer is on the rise.

More than 3 million North Americans develop some type of skin cancer every year.

Most cases involve basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas. These two types are strongly related to UV exposure over years. Fortunately, they are rarely fatal.

The deadly type is melanoma.

Since the 1970's, melanoma in adults has tripled. Approximately 7300 Canadians were diagnosed with melanoma last year.

The leading cause is overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Both UVA and UVB rays.

There is a strong link between melanoma risk and your number of sunburns, especially those during childhood.

Children and adolescents who get 5 or more sunburns have double the risk for melanoma later in life.

Even a single blistering sunburn before the age of 20 increases the risk. **Ouch!**

Tanning beds dramatically increase it. If you start using tanning beds before age 30, your risk of developing Melanoma jumps by 76%.

There are 2 types of UV rays and they are both harmful. The damage is cumulative and irreversible.

UVA rays penetrate deep into your body. They don't cause sunburn. However they cause skin aging, wrinkling and dark spots.

UVB rays burn your skin and are the primary contributor to skin cancer.

Both cause DNA damage and free radicals.

I know this sounds scary. We all need some sun exposure. We just have to be smart about it.

So what's a sun-smart person to do?

Here's a memorable formula to help: The 5 S's: **slip slop slap seek slide**

The 1st S – Slip on a shirt –The more skin you cover the better. So consider clothing as your first line of defense.

But getting them wet? That white cotton Tshirt you wear in the water will only protect you 3-4%.

You'd be smart to look for UPF clothing.

UPF measures how much of the sun's rays are penetrating a garment. A UPF 50 rating blocks out 98% of UV rays wet or dry. UPF protection applies to both UVA and UVB rays.

I have several shirts like this one from the Columbia outlet. Bass Pro stores carries UPF clothing, and on line companies such as Coolibar and UVSkinz.

For added protection, use UPF sleeves and neck buffs.

The 2nd S – Slop on the sunscreen to protect your hide when you're outside.

The Canadian Dermatology Association recommends SPF 30 or higher. 30 SPF blocks 97% of UVB rays; 50 SPF blocks 98%. In numbers higher than this, there's little difference in protection.

SPF only measures protection from the burning UVB rays. Make sure yours reads Broad Spectrum to protect against both rays.

To get the SPF protection the bottle claims, you must use the right amount. Most people don't – an adult in a swimsuit needs the equivalent of a shot glass full of sunscreen. Apply it every 2 hours you're outdoors.

Just so you're not confused by the acronyms; SPF measures sunscreen effectiveness and UPF measures clothing effectiveness.

The 3rd S – Slap on a hat – Which one of these do you think is best? The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends a hat with a brim that extends 3 inches or more all the way around to shade your face, neck, ears and top of the shoulders.

The 4th S – Seek shade – stay under cover when the sun is most intense – between 10 am and 2 pm. Golfers and non-golfers benefit from a UPF umbrella.

The 5th S – Slide on a pair of sunglasses – Make sure the tag reads they block 99-100% UV radiation. Bigger frames and lenses, and wrap-around styles protect more because they block peripheral rays. Wear them close to your face.

The most important thing to do is, if you see something unusual on your skin, have it checked out immediately.

In my younger years, I got a lot of sunburns. I didn't tan. I burned, peeled and was white underneath. Stupidly, I still kept trying to tan. I used sun beds before vacations so I could get a base and not burn.

And I paid for it. Here is my melanoma battle scar. This is the size of skin and tissue that was removed, **Ouch!** I have a recent scar on my face from basal cell too.

Now, when I see people out in the sun without protection, or going to tanning salons, I want to shake them, and yell "LOOK AT ME! I had melanoma. I was lucky – I survived! Last year, over 1200 Canadians didn't. You might not be as lucky as me!"

I want them to learn from my errors and not have to go through what I did ...especially because it's a cancer that is preventable.

Skin cancer can happen to you, if you're not protecting yourself. Sun-kissed skin is cancer-kissed skin.

This summer, respect the rays. Block the sun – not the fun. Please live a sun safe life.