# Fact vs. Fiction: Debunking Common Misconceptions about Skin Cancer, Sun Safety

## This Skin Cancer Awareness Month, the American Cancer Society shares information related to skin cancer and staying safe in the sun

**ATLANTA, April 30, 2024** – In the United States, more than 5 million cases of skin cancers are diagnosed each year. Despite its prevalence, there are still a number of misconceptions surrounding the disease. For Skin Cancer Awareness Month this May, the American Cancer Society (ACS) and Dr. Shanthi Sivendran, senior vice president, cancer care support at ACS, are sharing the facts behind some of these common fictions related to skin cancer and sun safety.

**FICTION**: Skin cancer is relatively rare, and not many people in the U.S. are diagnosed with skin cancer.
**FACT**: Skin cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in the nation. According to one estimate, about 5.4 million cases of skin cancer are diagnosed each year. While roughly 8 out of 10 new skin cancer cases are basal cell cancers, ACS estimates that about 100,640 new cases of melanoma skin cancer will be diagnosed in 2024. Though melanoma accounts for only about 1% of skin cancers, it is responsible for the large majority of skin cancer deaths.
“In the past several years, we’ve seen an increase in the number of people diagnosed with skin cancer over the age of 50,” Sivendran said. “This is more than likely a combination of factors, including more effective skin cancer detection, a history of significant sun exposure or tanning bed use , and the fact that many Americans are living longer.”

**FICTION**: The only thing that can cause skin cancer is sun exposure.
**FACT**: Most skin cancers are caused by too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays. And while the majority of this exposure comes from the sun, some can come from other sources, like indoor tanning beds and sun lamps. People who are exposed to high levels of UV rays are at greater risk for skin cancer. The main types of UV rays that can affect your skin include UVA rays and UVB rays. However, there are no safe UV rays. While UVB rays have more energy and are a more potent cause of at least some skin cancers, both UVA and UVB rays can damage skin and cause skin cancer.

**FICTION**: Skin cancer does not occur in those with darker skin.
**FACT**: Anyone can get skin cancer. While those with light skin are more likely to get skin cancer, darker-skinned people can also be affected.
“Everyone’s skin can be impacted by the sun and other forms of UV rays – regardless of their skin color,” Sivendran said.
Having darker skin lowers the risk of melanoma at the more common sites, like the legs, back and chest, but anyone can develop it on areas like the palms of the hands, soles of the feet and under the nails. In fact, melanomas found in these areas account for more than half of all melanomas in African American people but fewer than 1 in 10 melanomas in White people.

**FICTION**: Skin cancer is easy to spot, and always starts the same way: as a dark-colored bump that has newly emerged and is tender to the touch.
**FACT**: Skin cancers can show up on the skin in a range of colors, shapes, and sizes.
“It’s important to keep an eye out for any new growths, bumps or sores that don’t seem to heal, or any known spots that appear to be changing,” Sivendran said. “Because it can be difficult to tell the difference between skin cancer and an ordinary mole, be sure to reach out to your health care provider if you notice anything that causes concern.”

**FICTION**: If I'm wearing sunscreen, I can stay in the sun as long as I want.
**FACT**: Even if you are wearing sunscreen, you should try to avoid staying in the sun for hours on end. Sunscreen products do not provide complete protection from harmful UV rays.
“Try to seek shade when you can, and avoid spending long periods of time in the sun at midday,” Sivendran said. “Wearing a shirt and a hat with a wide brim can offer protection, along with using a broad-spectrum sunscreen rated SPF 30 or higher.”

Sunscreen should be reapplied every two hours. In addition, a lip balm with sunscreen can offer additional protection, and sunglasses that block UV rays can help protect the eyes and the skin around them.

**FICTION**: Getting a "base tan" is a good way to prevent a sunburn in the future.
**FACT**: A "base tan" – whether from the sun or an indoor tanning bed - offers very little protection against sunburn and additional UV exposure.
“There is really no such thing as a ‘safe tan,’” Sivendran said.

For more information and to test your own sun safety IQ, take the Sun Safety Quiz.

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**About the American Cancer Society**

The American Cancer Society is a leading cancer-fighting organization with a vision to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. For more than 100 years, we have been improving the lives of people with cancer and their families as the only organization combating cancer through advocacy, research, and patient support.  We are committed to ensuring everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer. To learn more, visit cancer.org or call our 24/7 helpline at 1-800-227-2345. Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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