Avoid over exposure to sunlight â€“ a safety measure against skin cancer

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As the largest organ of the body, skin serves as a barrier against germs and bacteria. It also helps to control body temperature and dispose of excess waste. As a key part of our body we have to keep our skin clean and dirt free. Though we give extra care to our skin, certain skin conditions occur without showing specific symptoms. Among the different diseases that affect the skin, the major one is skin cancer.

Most of the cancers often show no particular symptoms. So it is appropriate to undergo an appropriate cancer screening test in an annual basis. One of the main causes for skin cancer is the excessive exposure to sunlight.The UV rays in sunlight can change the genetic composition of the skin cells and this cause mutation. X-rays and sunlamps also generate UV rays that cause skin damage and malignant cell mutation. Though tanning and sunburn are skins response to UV radiation, it can lead to skin cancer. The sunburn you receive this year may take even more than 15 years to become a skin cancer. Other determining factors of skin cancer are heredity and the environment in which we live.

The most common symptom of skin cancer is a change in the appearance of the skin. It can be a sore or any growth that will not heal. Skin cancer can be of three types. They are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma. Among the three, basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma are the commonly found skin cancers.

Basal cell carcinoma - This type of cancer occur in areas that is highly exposed to sunlight. This includes neck, ear, lips, face and hand. In this type of cancer, the cancerous cells resemble the basal cell of the epidermis, which is the outer layer of the skin. The most common symptom of basal cell carcinoma is the development of sores on the skin that doesnâ€™t heal. This type of cancer never spread to other parts of the body, but will damage body cells by invading the surrounding area. Constant exposure to sun, age and light colored skin are the major factors that contribute to basal cell carcinoma. In U.S alone nearly 90% of skin cancer cases reported last year was basal cell carcinoma.

Squamous cell carcinoma - This type of cancer occurs in the sqamous cells of the body. In our body squamous cells can be found in the tissues that forms the surface of the skin. This type of cancer can occur in males than females. Squamous cell carcinomas have a tendency to spread to other parts of the body. These tumors usually begin as skin-colored or red nodules. Constant exposure to sunlight, light-colored skin and heredity are the important causes of squamous cell carcinoma. Punch biopsy is the primary method to detect squamous cell carcinoma.

Melanoma â€“ This type of cancer develops in the melanocytes, the pigment that gives color to the skin. This type of cancer is more dangerous than others, as it can spread to other parts of the body very easily and cause serious illness and even death. This year nearly 50,000 people are diagnosed with melanoma in the U.S. This type of cancer is curable when it is found in the early stages.

As per a research conducted by the American Academy of Dermatology, one in five Americans will get affected with some form of cancer in their lifetime. Though sun exposure is the major cause of skin cancer, those who have fair skin and light eyes are also prone to this type of cancer. Cancer detected in the early stages is curable. Unlike other cancers, skin cancer can be detected in the early stages itself. Recently many television channels connected with service from providers like Time Warner TV aired interesting programs on skin diseases and preventive methods.

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Ann is a freelancer. She is interested in writing about skin, its function and different diseases affecting it. She is a regular viewer of programs related to health on her home television powered by a Time Warner TV.

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