

# Health

## The New Skin Cancer Myth

Many women now think the disease is no big deal. Time to reality-check *that*, and learn easy ways to keep yourself safe.  
By Shaun Dreisbach

**T**he waiting room at Elizabeth K. Hale's dermatology office is very full these days—and with a lot of twenty- and thirtysomething faces. “I’m seeing twice as many young women come in for mole checks as I did even a couple of years ago,” says Dr. Hale, a clinical associate professor of dermatology at New York University Medical Center. “They’re wearing sunscreen more regularly and know they shouldn’t burn. There’s much more awareness about skin cancer now.”

That’s significant progress considering that just last year 76 percent of you admitted in a *Glamour* poll that you weren’t seeing your derm regularly for skin checks. But don’t drop the mike and walk away just yet, because there’s something else you should know about that waiting room full of women: They’re still tanning, often a *lot!* “Glowyskin is still the end game,” sighs dermatologist Melanie Palm, M.D., director of Art of Skin MD in Solana Beach, California, and a spokesperson for the Skin Cancer Foundation. Dr. Hale agrees: “Young women still come in bronzed,

thinking, As long as I don’t fry myself and I get checked, then I can get some color. But that’s like thinking that as long as your doctor checks your lungs once a year, then it’s totally fine to smoke.”

This flawed logic is one reason rates of melanoma—the deadliest form of skin cancer—keep rising. This year alone more than 137,000 cases will be diagnosed, making it the most common cancer among young women and seven times more common than breast cancer. Other skin cancers, like basal and squamous cell carcinomas, continue to skyrocket as well, climb-



Show us your sun-safety tools! Post a pic of your favorite SPF, hat, or sunnies on Instagram or Twitter, tag [@glamourmag](#) #SunFreeSelfie, and your photo could appear in an upcoming issue.

ing 300 percent from what they were two decades ago, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. And skin cancer is striking women earlier than ever before. Lacey Hancock, 30, of Salt Lake City, was just 23 years old when she got her first basal cell carcinoma. "In my teens and early twenties, tanning—lying out in the sun, using tanning beds—was huge," says Hancock. "It was all about that glow. I didn't care what it was doing to my skin."

So *why* are we so blasé about tanning, if we know how real a threat skin cancer is? One chilling factor experts cite: "The message that it's treatable if caught early has given women the misconception that 'Oh, it's just skin cancer. I'll have it removed and be OK,'" says Dr. Hale. "I have women say to me all the time, 'Well, that's why I come to see you, Dr. Hale. If I get it, you'll find it and take care of it.'"

### More Than Skin-Deep

If you're diagnosed with basal cell or squamous cell carcinoma, it's true that you may need only one small procedure to treat it. Most nonmelanoma skin cancers, which usually develop on the face, can be frozen or scraped off with minimal scarring—but only if they're caught early. If not? Well, listen to Hancock's cautionary tale. She recently had a squamous cell carcinoma removed from her nose that required hours of plastic surgery. "I have a scar that runs from my eyebrow down the side of my nose," she says. "Ironically, the reason it's so long is because I'm young. The surgeon didn't have extra tissue to pull over what was removed, like you'd have on an older person with looser skin. Afterward I looked in the mirror and couldn't stop crying."

Curing melanoma is not as easy. This type of skin cancer is—and please let this sink in—a *profoundly* big deal. "Melanoma is not a lesser cancer than breast or lung because it's on top of your skin," says Sapna Patel, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine and director of online media for melanoma medical oncology at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. "Melanoma can be invasive even if you see only a small lesion. It's the

# Inside a Crazy Cancer Trend

Why are women posting sunny Instagrams with hashtags like #skincancerherecome? *Glamour* got answers.

Here's a disturbing phenomenon: Tanners everywhere are sharing their bronzed photos with proud captions and hashtags like #skincancercomeatme and #skincancerdontcare. What the what? *Glamour* contributing editor Shaun Dreisbach, our in-house skin cancer expert and a melanoma survivor herself, contacted one poster—Amber, 40, a hairstylist in California (see right)—to see why she scoffs at cancer.

**GLAMOUR:** So just how often are you lying in the sun?

**AMBER:** I try to get out at least once a week in the morning for two to three hours. I like the brownish tone it gives me. I don't put on any sunblock—just olive oil—and I don't burn.

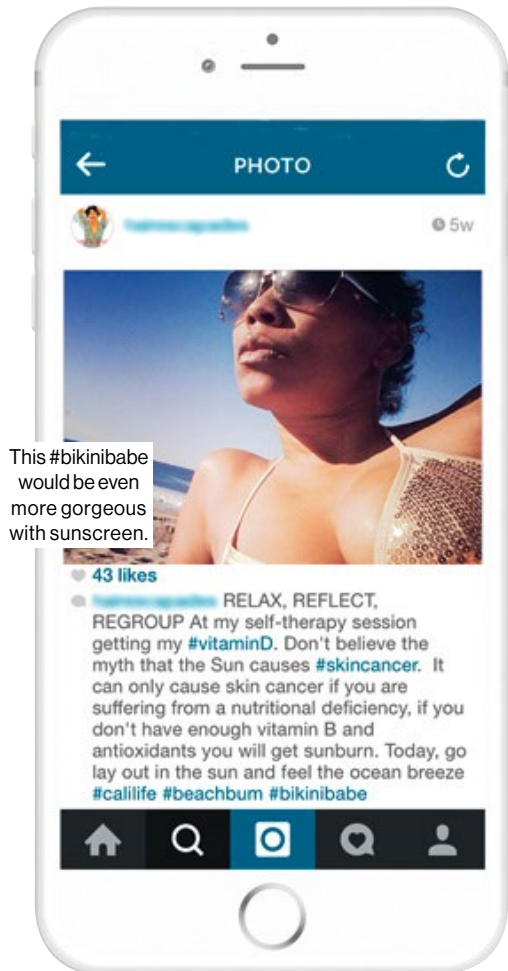
**GLAMOUR:** Wow, no burns?

**AMBER:** No, and that's because of how I eat. I try to include a lot of nutrients, because the only way you really get sunburned is if you're deficient in some.

**GLAMOUR:** That's not true! With skin cancer, experts know what causes most cases: the sun. That's why we hope to change your mind.

**AMBER:** I just feel like I don't get enough sun... It's so relaxing.

**GLAMOUR:** Totally. But you can still get those good vibes wearing SPF. One thing that swayed me was when a derm told me that a tan is actually DNA damage; it's your body putting up a shield to protect itself. That DNA damage is also a big cause of premature aging.



This #bikinibabe would be even more gorgeous with sunscreen.

**AMBER:** I just turned 40, but I look like I'm in my twenties!

I think that how you take care of yourself is what matters.

**GLAMOUR:** Yes, that's crucial. But I eat right and exercise—and I still had a melanoma when I was 30. I always worry, Will it come back?

**AMBER:** I'll definitely consider this, and I appreciate

the concern. What do I know? I'm always learning.

**The dermatologist says:** She's mistaken, like lots of women. "It takes only 15 minutes of sun exposure three times a week to produce enough vitamin D," says Dr. Palm. "More puts you at a *much* higher risk of skin cancer and premature aging."

## Sunscreen That Works

Don't just grab any old bottle. "The best sunscreen is broad-spectrum, SPF 30 or greater, and contains zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, which reflects light back into the environment so your skin literally doesn't see the sun," says Dr. Palm. These three make the grade.



only cancer that's measured in hundredths of millimeters. A lesion just one millimeter deep can be as dangerous as a seven-centimeter tumor of a different cancer." And it grows quickly; even the slightest change in size can worsen a diagnosis.

In fact, doctors say melanoma is so aggressive that it can spread to your blood vessels and lymph nodes in weeks. That's why a dermatologist just take off the mole, slap a Band-Aid on, and send you back to work. "We have to take a certain amount of skin tissue in all directions, which means a disfiguring scar that's four inches long, minimum," says Dr. Patel. When Bostonian Kirby Williams, 31, noticed that a mole on her left calf had gotten darker, she procrastinated for six months before seeing a dermatologist—by which point it was already stage II melanoma. "The cancer was beginning to invade my body," she says. "My doctor told me that if I had waited even a month more, I could have faced a very different prognosis. I could have died."

### Your Skin After Cancer

A single instance of any type of skin cancer is scary, but what's scarier is that one diagnosis dramatically increases your odds of getting another. Having melanoma, for example, makes you nine times more likely to get a second (or third or fourth) cancerous spot. Hancock has had six basal cell carcinomas and one squamous cell carcinoma crop up since her first diagnosis. "I have to see my doctor every six months for the rest of my life," she says. "It's been quite a healing process, physically and emotionally. I wish I had been more cautious."

The good news? "Skin cancer is largely preventable—we know 90 percent of cases are caused by the sun," says Dr. Hale. "I go to the beach every week in the summer, and I know how great it is to be outdoors. So I would never tell you *not* to go out and enjoy it. But you should never intentionally seek a tan. I'm getting so many women in their twenties asking for Botox and lasers because they have sun damage. It's crazy because if you look at any red carpet, the women who set the standard of beauty, so to speak, are the ones who protect themselves. The celebrities I treat are not tanning, and it shows."

So make like a celebrity: Get in the habit of applying sunscreen, reapplying hourly, and covering up with a hat, sunglasses, or an umbrella. In other words, don't be fearful of going outside—just be *careful*. **G**

*Shaun Dreisbach is a Glamour contributing editor. She lives in Vermont.*

# Do This Lifesaving Check Right Now

There's a reason *Glamour* has run this self-test for nine years straight: It has helped at least 88 readers spot their own skin cancers as well as those of loved ones.

"A few months ago I noticed a large mole with irregular borders on the back of my friend Kay Firth's calf—and I knew it was suspicious from reading *Glamour*," says Erin Martin, 39, of Atlanta. Four days later Firth, 59, got in to see a dermatologist. "They took one look at my mole and said, 'That's a malignant melanoma,'" says Firth. "Erin easily saved my life." Compare yourself here, and see a doctor for anything not "normal."



### Normal mole

It's fairly round and may be flat or raised. Most important: The spot is all one shade of pink, beige, or brown—and stays that way.



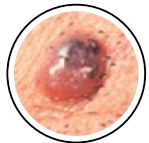
### Dysplastic nevus

This is an irregular—or "atypical"—mole that has uneven borders or coloring. It's not skin cancer but could turn into it, so your dermatologist may recommend removing it.



### Actinic keratosis

A red or pink spot that's flat, rough, scaly, or looks wart-ish. AKs aren't cancerous but could become a squamous or basal cell carcinoma. They're usually found on parts of the body that the sun frequently hits: face, scalp, lips, and hands.



### Basal cell carcinoma

This is not only the most common form of skin cancer, but it's the most common kind of cancer *period*. It looks like a sore that doesn't heal or a shiny, pink growth. And it's fast-growing, so no dermatologic dawdling.



### Squamous cell carcinoma

This is the second most common skin cancer. It looks like a raised growth with a depression in the middle. It can be disfiguring—and sometimes deadly—if not taken care of.



### Melanoma

It's the deadliest form of skin cancer (killing one person every hour in the U.S.) but highly curable if caught and treated early. Look for a very dark or multicolored mole that has irregular borders.

## Commit the ABCDE-U Test to Memory

This skin cancer alphabet is the key to identifying suspicious moles. Get to a dermatologist ASAP if you have one that matches any of the descriptions below.

**A – Asymmetry** One half of the mole is a different shape than the other.

**B – Border** The outside edges are blurred or jagged rather than even.

**C – Color** The mole is several shades of black, brown, or red.

**D – Diameter** Melanomas are often the size of a pencil eraser or larger.

**E – Evolving** If you check just one thing, make it this one: A new mole or one that has suddenly taken on a different size, shape, or color. "The biggest skin cancer indicator by far is a mole that's new or has changed in some way," says Dr. Palm.

**U – Ugly Duckling** A spot that doesn't look like any of your other ones or just gives you a bad feeling.