

Preventing Skin Cancer

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Matthew] I'm Matthew.

[Meg] And I'm Meg.

[Matthew] We both work in the Division of Cancer Prevention and Control here at CDC.

[Meg] Five million people every year are treated for skin cancer in the United States, so we wanted to talk to you about tips to protect your skin.

[Matthew] When I was younger, skin protection was an afterthought. It was a lot like eating right. I would tell myself that I could eat whatever I wanted, because I would eat better tomorrow. In the same way, I would promise myself that I would do a better job of covering up or protecting my skin in the future after staying out in the sun too long. But the bad news is that the damage to your skin—and the risk of skin cancer—doesn't go away. It adds up over time. So, what I've learned is that if the first time I think about protecting my skin is when I'm already outside, then it's much harder to cover up. I don't have my sunscreen. I probably forgot my wide-brimmed hat. And because of my light skin, I'm tempting a sunburn. What I do now is keep handy the things I need to protect my skin. I keep sunscreen in my backpack and briefcase. I keep a wide-brimmed hat with me. The more I prepare, the easier it is.

[Meg] Yes. As a mother, I've learned that I have to think ahead, too. I wear sunscreen routinely, and of course I'm always careful when going to the beach or pool. But there are other times when I'm not so prepared, like when I'm eating out on a patio or chatting with another mom on the playground, and if I'm not careful, the back of my neck gets burned. My husband carries his wide-brimmed hat everywhere we go, so if we end up being in a sunnier place than we'd expected, he's protected. I've started carrying a light scarf in my purse, which helps with the chilly air conditioning indoors, as well as unexpected time in the sun, and I put a tube of sunscreen in the car. I always have my bottle of water and sunglasses with me. I also keep a small tube of stick sunscreen in my purse, for me and for my daughter. She doesn't mind the stick—she thinks it's like putting on makeup! Sometimes she'll wear rash guards at the beach or pool, because then she doesn't have to put as much sunscreen on. One other way we try to be prepared is with shade. It's harder to bring along shade for things like soccer games, so I try to look for a good seat that's not too hot. If we're sitting in the sun we make sure to apply a broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher, take frequent breaks to cool off, get water, and spend some time in the shade.

[Announcer] Learn more at cdc.gov/cancer.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.