It's time to get serious: slip, slop, slap, seek and slide!

During National Skin Cancer Action Week (18-24 November) we urge Aussies, particularly Queenslanders, to remember the five S’s of summer: slip, slop, slap, seek and slide.

Most of us know we need to slip on sun-protective clothing, slop on SPF30 (or higher) broad-spectrum water-resistant sunscreen, and slap on a broad-brimmed hat; but do you remember to also seek shade and slide on sunglasses?

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) dermatologist Dr Leith Banney said summer holidays were a peak time for sunburn and irreversible sun damage.

“People who live in Queensland have the highest rates of melanoma in the world, and with two in three Aussies diagnosed with skin cancer by age 70, summer is a time to remind ourselves of the importance of sun protection and early skin cancer detection,” Dr Banney said.

“More than 2000 people in Australia die from skin cancer each year, yet most skin cancers can be prevented using good sun protection. As well as slip, slop, slap, seek and slide we really need to stay out of the sun in the heat of the day,” she said.

Dr Banney said that in summer our UV index (available in newspapers and phone apps for free) is extreme even from early in the morning.

“We need to avoid sun exposure when the UV index is greater than 3 and particularly we need to avoid burns as we know these are a risk factor for later development of melanoma and other skin cancers.

“There is a sunscreen for everyone, if you don't like greasy creams, gel blocks and spray on block is available. Better still, invest in rashies, lightweight wetsuits and don't forget to look after your eyes with wrap around UV protection sunglasses.”

Dr Banney said lighter skin types only need around seven minutes of early morning or afternoon summer sun (outside of the middle of the day -10am-3pm) in south east Queensland on the face and forearms for adequate vitamin D production.

“Don't kid yourself that you need long exposure for your health. Darker skin types of course can manage longer UV exposure times,” she said.
Peta’s Story

After having her first melanoma removed at 33 years old, Peta has a new outlook on sun protection.

With fair skin and freckles she’d always put sunscreen on but there wasn’t as much awareness of how to use sunscreen effectively.

Peta said: “I played a lot of sport as a child, we realised the importance of being protected but didn’t realise that putting it on once for the whole day doesn’t cut it.

“I’ve had seven melanomas removed over the last 21 years, the last one was just last month. The first one was discovered when I went for a medical for a job. It was such a shock, all I could think about was my life being in danger when I was so young.

“It seems so basic but knowing how to use sunscreen correctly is critical. Now the sunscreen goes on before I go out in the sun, I choose a good quality brand and reapply often. I also avoid the heat in the middle of the day.

“My message to parents is to lather their kids in sunscreen. Also, if anyone ever feels unsure about something on their skin, no matter how small, go straight to a specialist and get it checked out. Living on the coast, regular skin checks are a must, melanomas can be a very fierce cancer if not detected early,” Peta said.
MEDIA OPPORTUNITY:

Dr Leith Banney is available for interviews Mon 19 Nov 10:00-12:00 on request.

SCHHS client Peta is also available for phone interviews from 13:00-14:00 during National Skin Cancer Action Week (18-24 November).

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