

Skin Cancer on the Slopes

Skin cancer is a potentially deadly disease primarily associated with prolonged exposure to the sun. When summer rolls around, the store shelves are lined with sun block, and the television stations include a UV index with every weather report. But even though the interest peaks during the hot summer months, skin cancer is certainly no summertime disease.

In recent years, skin cancer causes and treatments have been hot topics in the medical field. But it wasn't until recently that concerns about skiers' risk of skin cancer surfaced and, as a matter of fact, skiers are at high risk indeed.

The reflection of the sun off of the snow, combined with the high altitudes of certain slopes, create very dangerous conditions for skiers. These adventurous souls usually consider broken bones, frostbite or avalanches to be cause for worry, and rarely do they consider the risk of skin cancer.

In a recent study, researchers designed badges that were capable of monitoring ultraviolet radiation. The reports showed that on the ski slopes, the levels of ultraviolet rays that skiers faced were far higher than expected, and these levels increased with the altitude height. Further, the UV levels rose with the amount of snow. More snow created more reflection of the sun's rays, thus increasing the UV exposure. The researchers also proved that because the air was cleaner at higher altitudes, more ultraviolet light was able to get through. One final theory derived from the study is that the UV rays also increased with the thinning of the air. Air becomes thinner at higher altitudes, and there is less air to disperse the sun's rays.

With these results in hand, researchers were able to prove that in terms of UV exposure, an afternoon of winter skiing is no different than a summertime day on the beach.

Skiers are strongly advised to apply good sunscreen to their faces and exposed skin before heading out to the slopes. Hats should also be worn, not only for warmth, but also for protection from the sun. Sunglasses or protective goggles are just as important. Even with your hat and goggles in place, your cheeks, nose and chin are still exposed. Wearing a scarf can certainly help to protect your delicate skin from UV harm, but you should still cover up with an extra layer of protection. Use an SPF 30 sunscreen on the ski hills.

Don't assume that only fair-skinned blondes and redheads are at risk of developing skin cancer on the slopes. Even those with olive skin or dark skin, who may think that they are safe because they never get sunburns, are still exposing their skin to the same ultraviolet rays. This means that all skiers are at risk.

Another point to keep in mind is that the temperature of the air has absolutely nothing to do with the UV levels from the sun. On the contrary, the peak hours for ultraviolet exposure on the ski slopes are from late morning to early afternoon.

Next time you're gearing up to hit the ski hills, remember to pack along one more piece of protective equipment: an SPF 30 sunscreen to protect you from the very real danger of acquiring skin cancer on the slopes.