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Take care of your skin this summer

Did you know that skin cancer is the most common cancer in New Zealand?

Two out of three New Zealanders are affected by skin cancer in their lifetime, with 250 kiwis dying from it each year, that's one of the highest rates of melanoma deaths in the world.

There are two types of rays from the sun that get through the atmosphere and cause sunburn in the short term and skin cancer in the long term. UVB rays reach the top layers of the skin and cause burning, whereas UVA rays get deep into the skin, causing premature aging and a "leathery" appearance. The Ultraviolet Index (UVI) is a measure of ultraviolet rays. The higher the number the more sun protection needed. Even on a mild spring day, the UVI in Hawke's Bay will hit 10 (very high); the maximum being 11 (extreme).

And despite what anyone says there is no such thing as a safe tan.

The golden rule is to SLIP, SLOP, SLAP, WRAP!!!

SLIP into a shirt – and slip into some shade. Plan outdoor activities early or late in the day to avoid peak sunlight hours (10am-4pm)

SLOP on a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 on all areas of the body, including the lips, even on cloudy days. Reapply sunscreen regularly. Do this 15 minutes after the first application to ensure complete coverage, and also after physical activity, swimming or towel drying. The Sunsense range of sunscreens is widely recommended.

SLAP on a broad-rimmed hat, or a cap with flaps. More people get burned on the face and neck more than on any other part of the body,

WRAP on a pair of sunglasses. Choose close-fitting, wrap-around glasses that meet the Australian standard AS1067.

Eating foods high in antioxidants or rich in Lycopene may also help protect you against sun damage. These include red grapes, berries, tomatoes, broccoli, spinach, garlic and whole grains. Lycopene is found in pink grapefruits and watermelons but the richest source is tomatoes, particularly tomato paste.

Remember skin cancers, such as melanoma, start in different ways. If you notice any of the following, see your doctor immediately, even if it looks trivial. Early treatment is always easier.

- Any unusual skin condition that does not heal in four weeks.
- Any new mole or freckle.
- Any mole or freckle that starts to grow, changes its shape, changes colour, bleeds, becomes painful or itchy, or shows redness, darkening or a dull brownish zone around the mole.