Avoid the Burn of Summer

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The sun is coming and soon enough it will be hot enough outside to get some vitamin D. So, what does that mean? Well, there are a few kinds of folks out there: the ones that live on the beach, those athletes who run and bike for miles at a time, and pale exhausted students. It’s okay if you, like most of the school, fall into the pale student category. With summer classes coming up and lots of activities, getting some time outside in the sun is important for students. However, as beautiful as the sun can be, its rays can be harmful to the skin.

In my life before being a student I was a skin care consultant and esthetician (long word for person who studies skin). The biggest concern from clients was always sun exposure. There is a strong link between Ultra Violet rays and skin cancer. The UVA rays sink deep into the dermis, causing all sorts of damage. Here is a fun fact: your skin at its thickest is 1.5 millimeters on your palms and soles of the feet, and thinnest on the eyelids at 0.05 mm. Just in case you need to know for bar trivia.

You may have also heard about Ultra Violet B (UVB) rays. When you get burned to a crisp outside, UVB rays are to blame, along with not applying sun screen. In addition, UVB rays can also cause aging under the epidermis (top layer of skin) and sink into the dermis. This can cause spots and lines to appear years down the road after your sunburn or tan.

Here’s the deal, skin cancer is prevalent. According to the Office of Air and Radiation of Minnesota, an average of 1,054 Minnesota residents were diagnosed with melanoma (skin cancer) from 2003-2007. During that time, new cases of melanoma diagnoses rose more than 7 percent per year. Most people know of someone who has gotten a cancerous growth on the skin removed. If melanoma goes untreated, the cancer can spread. Starting proper use of sunscreen and avoiding sunburns early is one way of reducing your skin cancer risk.

Here are your options to limit sun exposure:

-Hit the books and stay inside. It totally sucks, but face it, summer classes are rough. The past six summers of my life have been spent in classrooms, and I’ve never gotten a burn while learning. I have however learned how to draw some pretty cool unicorns on surfboards.

-Apply sunscreen half-an-hour before sun exposure, and reapply every two hours. And know the term “water resistant” is not the same as “waterproof.” Drying off after going swimming and reapplying is advised. If your jerk friend dunks you in the water after you apply sunscreen, curse at them and reapply.

-Look into buying sun-resistant clothing and some hats. For long bike rides or hikes, it’s nice to have a breathable, sun-resistant shirt, in addition to covering up your head. But remember, if you’re wearing a baseball cap your ears are still exposed and will burn to a crisp.

Be careful as you enjoy the beautiful summer, and remember, no one likes that jerk who knocks people into the pool. Don’t be that guy. Also, apply—and reapply—that wonderful sunscreen this summer.