

SKIN SENSE

Keep Yourself Safe from Skin Cancer

(NAPSA)—Taking care of your skin does more than preserve your looks—it can save your life.

Science has long recognized the role of ultraviolet (UV) rays in causing serious skin diseases. UV rays can suppress the skin's immune function and damage DNA. Conditions such as wrinkles, freckles and precancerous skin lesions, once believed to be a natural process of aging, are now understood as consequences of sun-diseased skin and chronic sun exposure.

One common, but often unrecognized example of sun-diseased skin is actinic keratosis (AK)—which may be an early warning sign of skin cancer. AK affects more than 10 million Americans each year. AK may appear as rough, red, scaly patches or crusts on the skin. They usually measure less than one quarter inch and are found primarily on areas of the body exposed to the sun, including the face, ears, lips, scalp, neck, back of the hands and arms.

AK can take years to develop—the condition usually first appears in older people, although cases have been reported in people in their 40s. Individuals with fair skin and a history of cumulative sun exposure and those living in sunny climates are at the greatest risk for developing AK.

In order to reduce the risk of AK and skin cancer, the American Academy of Dermatology recommends adopting a comprehensive sun protection program that includes wearing a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher; reapplying sunscreen every two hours when outdoors; wearing protective clothing, such as a wide-brimmed hat, long-sleeved shirt and sun-



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glasses; avoiding the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when UV rays are strongest; and seeing your dermatologist annually.

A number of treatment options for AK are available, including cryosurgery (freezing), surgical excision, and curettage (scraping) with or without electrosurgery (heat generated by an electric current). The newest topical medication is Aldara™ (imiquimod) Cream, 5%, the only immune response modifier approved to treat certain types of AK on the face or scalp.

In AK clinical studies, the most common side effects involved skin reactions in the application area. These included redness, swelling, erosions, weeping, scabbing, itching, and burning. Most skin reactions were rated mild to moderate.

Exposure to sunlight (including sunlamps) should be avoided or minimized during use of Aldara Cream because of concern for heightened sunburn susceptibility. Patients should be warned to use protective clothing (hat) when using Aldara Cream.

For more information about Aldara Cream, AK or for full prescribing information, visit www.aldara.com or 1-877-4-AK-NEWS.