

HEALTH ALERT!

Too Much Sun Can Be No Fun Later In Life

(NAPSA)—Bronzed skin? A healthy glow? You may think you look good today, but underneath it's not such a pretty picture. That's because overexposure to the sun can lead to a serious form of skin cancer later in life.

Growing up, Richard Ink spent much of his life outdoors—on the beach, working in the yard, fishing, and sun tanning. Little did he know that the sun's rays have put his health at serious risk. Now he knows first hand the dangers of the sun. "At first, I thought they were sun spots or age spots, but then they got bigger and didn't go away," says Richard, referring to the red, scaly patches he noticed on his arms a few years ago. To his surprise, Richard, now in his 70s, was diagnosed with the early signs of skin cancer called Actinic Keratoses, also known as AKs.

Caused by long-term sun exposure, AKs are a very common skin condition that may progress to a serious type of skin cancer called squamous cell carcinoma, the second leading cause of skin cancer deaths in the United States. In fact, at least 40 percent of all squamous cell carcinomas begin as AKs.

AKs appear as rough, red, scaly patches on the top layer of the skin, measuring anywhere from one-quarter to one-inch in diameter. They are found primarily on areas of the body exposed to the sun, such as the face, ears, back of the hands, forearms, and scalp. Because AKs take years to develop, they usually occur in older people, but can also be found on younger people in their 20s and 30s. Fair-skinned people who live in sunny climates and those who have a history of chronic sun exposure are more likely to develop AKs.



Skin spots or a blemish that changes in color or size should signal a visit to the dermatologist.

"We are treating an increasing number of patients with AKs, and unfortunately, most could be prevented with simple precautions," says dermatologist Ronald Moy, M.D., Associate Clinical Professor of Dermatology at the University of California, Los Angeles. In order to prevent AKs and skin cancer, the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recommends a comprehensive sun protection program that includes: wearing protective clothing and a wide-brimmed hat, avoiding the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when ultraviolet rays are strongest, and wearing sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.

"AKs are treatable, and in most cases, curable, which is why awareness and early detection are essential. A wide range of therapies are available to treat AKs such as surgery, freezing therapy, or patient-applied, prescription topical creams, among other options," says Dr. Moy.

For more information, contact the AAD at its toll-free number, 1-888-462-DERM (3376), or through their Web site, www.aad.org.