

best defense

Protecting your skin against skin cancer means getting even more savvy about things that could cause it harm.

Here are six mistakes to avoid. **BY KAREN ASP**

MISTAKE:
Exfoliating *too frequently* and forgetting to protect against the sun



Sitting too close to a compact fluorescent lamp (CFL)



MISTAKE:
Having a cocktail, especially white wine

MISTAKE:
Not seeking cover from windows



MISTAKE: Applying only one layer of sunscreen



MISTAKE: Going for a base tan in a bed



gone are the days when you'd lie out like an iguana and soak in the sun. Now that you're older and wiser, you're trying to be smarter about protecting your skin. Good thing, too, because melanoma, the second most common

form of skin cancer in women aged 15 to 29, has increased 6.1 percent annually in Caucasian women younger than 44, according to the American Academy of Dermatology.

Yet while you may have nixed that sun-bathing habit, other things you may be doing could increase your skin cancer odds without you even knowing it. Here are six to put on your radar:

1
MISTAKE: Sitting too close to a compact fluorescent lamp (CFL)

► **The Fix:** You know that skin-damaging ultraviolet (UV) rays come from the sun. But a lightbulb? Turns out that CFLs with defective coatings could leak UVA, UVB and UVC rays, all of which can harm skin. In one study, most of the CFL bulbs that researchers tested had defects in the coating, leaking UV to different degrees. That UV is measured in terms of threshold limit value (TLV), or the level to which it's believed a person could be exposed on a daily basis (for eight hours) without adverse effects. TLV for some of the bulbs was reached in less than an hour, some in only a few minutes, making that leaked amount potentially harmful, says Miriam Rafailovich, Ph.D., study co-author and distinguished professor at Stony Brook University in New York. Protect yourself by sitting at least 2 feet from these bulbs, and avoid looking directly into them because they could also cause retinal damage.

2
MISTAKE: Applying only one layer of sunscreen

► **The Fix:** When it comes to slathering on the sunscreen, two layers is better than one. That's what researchers found after measuring SPF levels of sunscreen when applied at three different thicknesses, according to this study from *Clinical and Experimental Dermatology*. Most folks

apply too little, which is why the two-layer rule could offer better protection. Use a sunscreen with SPF 30, and don't forget your nose, ears and lips, says Elizabeth Tanzi, M.D., founder and director of Capital Laser & Skin Care and associate clinical professor of dermatology at George Washington University Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

3
MISTAKE: Not seeking cover from windows

► **The Fix:** Just because you're inside doesn't mean you're safe from the sun. If you're near a window, whether in your car, office or an airplane, you could be getting a high dose of UV rays. "Although UVB is effectively blocked by glass, at least 50 percent of UVA (which like UVB harms the skin and can cause skin cancer) can pass through windows," says David Bank, M.D., spokesman for the Skin Cancer Foundation and founder and director of The Center for Dermatology, Cosmetic & Laser Surgery in Westchester, New York.

One study found that nearly 53 percent of skin cancers in the United States occurs on the left — or drivers' side — of the body. To protect yourself, do more than just wear broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher. Cover up with long pants, sleeves and UV-blocking sunglasses. When flying, request an aisle seat or close the shade if you're sitting by the window because you'll be more exposed to UV radiation at higher altitudes. Sun exposure actually increases 4 to 5 percent with every 1,000 feet above sea level, Bank says. Also, consider installing protective film to the windows of your car and home, even your office if your boss allows. And if possible, avoid driving or flying midday when the sun's rays are the strongest.

4
MISTAKE: Having a cocktail

► **The Fix:** Although alcohol has been shown to have health benefits like reducing risk of cardiovascular death, it may not be your skin's best friend. According to a study in the journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, just one drink a day — white wine was the worst offender — raised the risk of invasive melanoma by 14 percent. Even more surprising, risk was higher in parts of the body that received less sun exposure. What's going on? "Alcohol can cause carcinogenesis as the ethanol can cause carcinogenesis as the ethanol in alcohol metabolizes into acetaldehyde,

which damages DNA and prevents DNA repair," says Eunyoung Cho, Sc.D., associate professor of dermatology and epidemiology at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Alcohol consumption has been associated with increased risk of many other cancers, like breast and colorectal, he adds. Now add melanoma to that list, which means sip wisely, weighing the pros and cons carefully.

5
MISTAKE: Exfoliating too frequently and forgetting to protect against the sun

► **The Fix:** Exfoliating can go a long way in keeping your skin looking younger and healthier. Yet most women over-exfoliate, using cleansing brushes with harsh cleaners and facial scrubs a few times a week. "Overly aggressive exfoliation leads to stripping the skin of its natural oils and inflammation, which can increase acne, worsen rosacea and accelerate the aging process," Tanzi says. Plus, your skin is then more sensitive to the sun, which could increase your risk for burning, especially if you exfoliate in the morning. The key is to limit exfoliation. While oily skin types can exfoliate daily, normal skin types should exfoliate no more than every other day and sensitive and dry skin types only once a week. After exfoliating, be extra vigilant about using sun protection and avoiding being outdoors in peak sun hours (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

6
MISTAKE: Going for a base tan in a bed

► **The Fix:** In spite of increased awareness about the health risks of tanning beds, young women are still using them. In one survey, 45 percent of college-aged women said they had used a tanning bed, 30 percent of them in the last year. Yet not only is the notion of a base tan a fallacy — "a tan by definition is the skin's response to damage and that damage adds up," Tanzi says — but exposing your skin to a tanning bed will also significantly increase your risk of skin cancer, which may be why skin cancer rates in young women have risen. A whopping 97 percent of women diagnosed with melanoma before age 30 have engaged in indoor tanning, Bank says. That tanning bed is also terrible for wrinkles and brown spots and makes the skin look leathery after a while. Instead, opt for a spray tan so you don't ruin your skin, Tanzi recommends. ♦♦