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UI HEALTH CARE ORGAN TRANSPLANT CENTER

As the warmer weather, longer days, and outdoor activities of summer swing into full gear, it is crucial to remember the importance of sun safety. Immunosuppressed patients are at a significantly increased risk of developing skin cancer, and sun exposure is the most important risk factor that you can control. You should protect your skin from the sun every day and perform a self-skin exam once a month. If you have any skin concerns, bring them to your transplant team's attention immediately.

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Transplants and Skin Cancer

People who have received an organ transplant are at higher risk for developing skin cancer than the general population. For example, the risk of squamous cell carcinoma is about 100 times higher after a transplant. Not all transplant recipients will develop skin cancer.

The most common types of skin cancer include squamous cell carcinoma, basal cell carcinoma, melanoma, and Merkel cell carcinoma. Skin cancers also behave differently in transplant patients.

This increased risk is caused by immunosuppressive medications, which are essential to prevent organ rejection and for the survival of the transplant. The risk also depends on the type of transplant received.

Skin cancer can take many years to develop. It is very important that you see a dermatologist **at least** once a year for skin surveillance.

Stay Safe in the Sun!

Here are some tips to stay safe when in the sun!

1. Avoid direct sunlight as much as possible and seek shade when able.
 - Peak hours are usually 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
2. Wear water-resistant, broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF of at least 30). The best sunscreen is one you will use every day!
 - Protects against UVA and UVB rays
 - Look for ingredients like Parsol 1789 (avobenzone) or titanium dioxide
3. Reapply sunscreen frequently—at least every two hours when outside.
4. Wear a hat and/or protective clothing while in the sun.
5. Use sunglasses with UV protection.

Recognizing Skin Cancers

Melanoma is the deadliest type of skin cancer. The ABCs show common signs of melanoma:

- **A**symmetry: Borders with no pattern
- **B**order irregularity: Ragged or notched
- **C**olor: Multiple shades of brown or black within one mole
- **D**iameter: Often 6mm or larger
- **E**volution: Changed over time

Basal cell carcinoma is the most common skin cancer that usually doesn't spread and is rarely fatal. It occurs on sun-exposed areas that often look like pink bumps with the following features:

- Pearly or waxy appearance
- Sunken center
- Irregular blood vessels on the surface
- Tendency to bleed easily after injury

Squamous cell carcinoma is the second most common skin cancer that can spread or recur if not caught early and is rarely deadly. It is often found on the head, hands, ears, neck, and forearms with the following features:

- Raised, dull-red skin lesion
- Thick crusted scale
- Ulcerated appearance

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