



# LFSA YOUTH NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2018

## Summer is coming to an end, but don't put the sunscreen away just yet!

It's no secret that our skin serves us well, especially in this season. As our largest organ, our skin plays many different roles, such as protecting our delicate insides from exposure to potentially dangerous things on the outside, like bacteria, toxins, and UV rays. While our skin is working so hard at protecting our organs, blood vessels, and muscles, we need to make sure we're also working hard to protect it from excess sun exposure, a major cause of skin cancer. When it comes to protecting our skin, however, there can be a lot of misleading information about sunscreen, sun protection, and the best way to avoid skin cancer. To help shed some (sun)light on the situation, we asked Dr. Brian Toy, a dermatologist in sunny Southern California, to give us some advice for protecting our skin from the sun.

One of the cancers often seen in people with Li-Fraumeni Syndrome is melanoma, a type of skin cancer. We asked Dr. Toy for his opinion on the best way to avoid developing melanoma. ***"Melanoma is correlated with sun exposure, particularly blistering sunburns as a child,"*** he explained. ***"As a result, sun protection and avoidance of sun tanning are two ways to minimize your risk of developing melanoma. Unfortunately, some melanomas are genetic (as in LFS) and not necessarily related to sun exposure. In these cases, early detection is critical to remove the melanoma before it spreads to other parts of the body. Therefore, monthly self-exams and annual visits with your dermatologist are highly recommended."*** So, when being mindful of skin cancer and your skin's overall health, it's important to protect it from the sun, avoid suntanning and tanning beds ("Alternatives to tanning beds include spray tans and self-tanning lotions, which are perfectly safe," says Dr. Toy), and have your skin checked regularly, by both you and a dermatologist.

When performing a self-exam on your skin, it can be tough to tell whether a mole or a birthmark is anything of concern, especially if you have a lot of them! To help with this, Dr. Toy tells his patients, "Look for the ugly duckling. Any mole that looks different from the others is one to keep an eye on." In particular, he says to look for the ABCD's of skin cancer:

**Asymmetry** - If you compare both halves of the mole, do they look quite different from one another?

**Irregular Border** - Do the outer edges of the mole look oddly shaped or "lumpy," instead of smooth and round?

**Unusual Color** - Is the mole made up of a different color or colors than the rest of your birthmarks?

**Large Diameter** - Is the mole much larger than the others?

If you see a mole that meets any of the above criteria, or just doesn't look right to you, don't hesitate to make an appointment with your dermatologist to have it looked at. There's no harm in staying on the cautious side!

Along with performing monthly self-exams, another important thing you can do to care for your skin, that most are aware of, is using sunscreen. Not only does wearing sunscreen help prevent skin cancer, but it also protects your skin from developing premature wrinkles, brown spots, and thinning of the skin. (This type of damage is usually seen once you're older, because it's caused by cumulative sun exposure.) Sun damage can also make acne scars darker!

There are many different brands and types of sunscreens on the market, but choosing the right one for you doesn't have to be overwhelming. Believe it or not, all of those sunscreens can be boiled down to two types: physical sunblocks and chemical sunblocks. Physical sunblocks contain either titanium dioxide or zinc oxide (sometimes

both), which are mineral ingredients. They act like millions of tiny mirrors that reflect sunlight off the skin. Chemical sunblocks, on the other hand, act like a sponge to absorb ultraviolet light and chemically convert it to something less dangerous. An easy way to tell if a sunblock is a chemical block is to see if it contains ingredients with names you can't pronounce (like oxybenzone, avobenzone, octisalate, octocrylene, homosalate, and octinoxate).

Now, which one should you choose: physical sunblocks or chemical sunblocks? According to Dr. Toy, **"Physical sunblocks provide better protection across the ultraviolet spectrum, but some people don't like them because they turn chalky white when applied. That's why chemical sunblocks tend to be more popular. But for sports, the pool or beach, I recommend a physical block."** There are also skin-colored, tinted physical sunscreens you can use (such as Dr. Toy's recommendation, La Roche-Posay Anthelios Mineral SPF 50 Sunscreen Tinted) that altogether eliminate the white film that regular sunblocks can leave on your skin. If you are active in outdoor sports and activities, he recommends also wearing a hat if you can, and covering your torso with a swim shirt or rash-guard.

With all of this talk about protecting yourself from the sun and avoiding skin cancer, it can make you wonder, are there even any good qualities of the sun? Don't worry; there are! Dr. Toy explains that, "We need some sun exposure to properly synthesize Vitamin D, which is important for bone health. Sun exposure is also important for mental health, as it improves mood and emotional well-being. All of this can be accomplished with sun exposure in moderation."

In addition, dermatologists actually take advantage of the anti-inflammatory effects of ultraviolet radiation and use ultraviolet phototherapy to treat diseases such as psoriasis and vitiligo!

When caring for your skin, skin exams and sunscreen usage are some practical and easy habits to develop. However, when living with Li-Fraumeni Syndrome, it's also important to not to let the threat of skin cancer ruin the time you have enjoying activities outside! As Dr. Toy says: "Don't be afraid of skin cancer. If it's caught early, it's totally curable." So, be smart; be safe, and, most of all, enjoy your summer!

## Sun Protection: Fact or Fiction?

*Sun exposure can make your acne worse.*

**Fiction!** Dr. Toy's answer: "Ironically, the sun actually helps to suppress the acne itself, which is why many teens see improvement in their acne over the summer." (Don't take that as an excuse to not wear sunscreen on your face, though!)

*Wearing sunblock means you can stay out in the sun longer than you could without wearing it.*

**Fiction!** Dr. Toy's answer: "Some people put on sunblock and are lulled into a false sense of security. They think because they have sunblock on, they can roast themselves all day in the sun. So in fact, they are getting even more sun exposure than they would be without using any sunblock at all."

*You often can't feel melanoma in its early stages.*

**Fact!** Dr. Toy's answer: "It's important to remember that most melanomas, particularly in the early stages, are totally asymptomatic. They don't itch, they don't bleed, there's no pain, and oftentimes, you can't even feel them. So it's really important to look for visual cues, particularly in areas that you can't always see, such as your scalp and back."

*Dr. Brian Toy is a board-certified dermatologist with a private practice in Mission Viejo, CA. He serves on the faculty of the University of Southern California, where he is a Clinical Professor in the School of Medicine. His favorite thing about being a dermatologist? "My patients. In dermatology, I really enjoy the continuity of care as I see my patients progress from childhood to young adult, from parent to grandparent and even great-grandparent. My oldest patient is 104. He still drives by himself to see me every 6 months... lots of skin cancer after being in the sun for 104 years!"*

### UPCOMING EVENTS:

- \ "Ask a Genetic Counselor" Webinar - Oct 14th, 2018
- \ LFSA Fall Gymnastics Invitational - Oct 19th, 2018
- \ Salute! Hartford 2018 - Oct 28th, 2018

**Holiday Card  
Contest 2018**

**Submissions due  
September 1st**