

# Sun Protection AND THE TIMING OF SKIN DAMAGE

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One of the most common things I hear in my practice is, "Why do I need a skin check? I haven't been in the sun." You may be protecting your skin diligently however, despite our best efforts, some damage has been done from years of sun exposure.

Let's shed some light on the intricate relationship between sun exposure and long-term skin health.

Immediate and noticeable effects of the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays is a sunburn, leading to redness, pain and inflammation. If you do not burn but tan, do not be fooled. These acute responses indicate damage to the outer layer of the skin (the epidermis). This serves as a warning sign of excessive sun exposure and repeated sunburns and tanning lead to damage that shows up later in life.

The most concerning effects of cumulative sun exposure are the long-term consequences that may not manifest for years or even decades after the initial damage occurred.

Chronic sun exposure can accelerate development of cataracts, sunspots, freckles, melasma, skin aging, wrinkles, fine lines

and sagging skin to name a few. Additionally, it increases the risk of skin cancers, including melanoma, basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma.

It is essential to understand that when UV rays penetrate the skin, it causes an inflammatory response and DNA damage at a cellular level in the deepest layers of the skin (the dermis). It can take many years to see the visible changes, but the damage has been done.

The timing and extent of sun damage will vary depending on individual factors such as sun protective practices, skin type, genetics, lifestyle habits as well as geographical location and environmental conditions.

However, while the timing of sun damage may vary, the key to maintaining healthy skin lies in prevention and protection. We all know we should wear broad-spectrum sunscreen, seek shade during peak sun hours, and wear protective clothing to minimize the harmful effects of sun exposure and maintain youthful, radiant skin years to come.

Don't forget your regular skin examinations that lead to early detection of skin cancer in its early stages.

