

Sun-Exposed Skin: Decreasing the Risk

The safest recommendation for avoiding the risks of sun damage to skin and skin cancer is to avoid sun exposure. For those who must spend time in the sun, the safest option for avoiding risk is to wear long pants, long sleeve shirts, and a hat that shades the face and neck at all times when outdoors. Obviously, these recommendations are not going to work for the sport of beach volleyball. So competitors in our sport need to regard sun exposure as a necessary risk. Fortunately, there are steps that all athletes can and should take to minimize their risk.

What are the risks?

Melanoma is the most severe form of skin cancer, and its incidence has been increasing over the last 30 years. If it is diagnosed before it spreads to the lymph nodes, melanoma has a greater than 90% cure rate. If diagnosed later in its course, melanoma can be fatal. Squamous cell and basal cell carcinoma of the skin have also been increasing. Chronic sun exposure also results in gradual damage to human skin. First, there is a loss of elasticity of the skin resulting in fine lines, wrinkles and sagging skin. Over many years sun exposure results in slowing of the renewal of skin cells. This causes skin to become thickened, poorly hydrated and leathery. The thinning of the protective ozone layer is felt to be responsible for these increased risks.

Links to American Academy of Dermatology fact sheet on skin cancer:
http://www.aad.org/media/background/factsheets/fact_skincancer.html

And melanoma:
http://www.aad.org/media/background/factsheets/fact_melanoma.html

How can the risks be minimized?

First and most important - avoid sunburn. The more times an individual gets sunburn on an area of their skin at a young age, the greater their risk of melanoma on that skin area during the course of their life. Second, is a re-adjustment in attitude for many of us: we should try **not** to get a tan. Many individuals, especially among the people one might find on the beach, believe that a tan makes a person appear healthy. There is nothing healthy about a healthy tan. While it is true that a tan does not confer the same risk that a sunburn does, tanning occurs because of cumulative sun exposure, which increases the risk of skin cancer and sun damage to skin. Beach volleyball athletes may get a tan from their time spent training and competing in the sun, but it is not something to strive for. All athletes, whether they have a tan or not, should adhere to the recommendations below to decrease sun exposure risk.

What steps can be taken?

- 1) Do not spend extra time in the sun. The hours necessary to train in this sport already put you at risk. If you are not playing or training, either head for the shade or cover up. If you are watching or scouting other competitors, find a seat that is not in the sun.
- 2) Use sunscreen at all times. When playing, apply a broad spectrum sunscreen (with UVA and UVB protection) of at least SPF 30 that is water-resistant. No sunscreen is truly "waterproof." All of them sweat off with time and must be re-applied. Re-apply at least every 2 hours. Apply to every inch of your sun-exposed skin. Try to rub over each area twice to avoid missing a spot that will then become sunburned.
- 3) When you are not playing, try to change into clothes that cover all exposed skin, and wear a large hat that shades your face and neck.
- 4) Get a skin check: have your skin checked for skin cancer by a dermatologist or primary care physician once each year.