Lip Cancer

NOT SOMETHING TO "GLOSS" OVER

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States, with more than 1 million cases of skin cancer—including lip cancer—diagnosed every year, says the National Cancer Institute. According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, more than 90 percent of all skin cancers are caused by sun exposure. Taking that one step further, more than 30 percent of patients with lip cancer have outdoor jobs associated with prolonged exposure to sunlight, according to the American Cancer Society. So why are you reading about skin cancer in Word of Mouth? Because while you may regularly use sunscreen for your face, arms, and legs, you could be one of the 63 percent of sunscreen users who neglect to protect their lips. But if you're one of the millions of women who routinely swipe shiny lip gloss or lip balm across your pucker, you think that means your lips are safe, right? Maybe not, according to recent research indicating that the shiny stuff you paint on your lips may be causing more harm than good.

In a nutshell, lips are skin—very thin, fragile skin that dries out quite easily. To combat this drying, people often apply lip balm; for years, women have been using cosmetic lip gloss or lip balms as a way to moisturize their lips, while adding some shine to their smiles and brightening up their faces. But this spring, Dr. Christine Brown, a dermatologist from Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas, issued a warning that these shiny lip glosses and balms may actually attract ultraviolet (UV) rays and increase the risk of skin cancer. Dr. Brown theorizes that the slick, shiny nature of lip gloss could be making the sun's UV rays penetrate directly through the skin, instead of getting reflected off of the skin's surface.

"What people don't realize is that they're actually increasing light penetration through the lip surface by applying something clear and shiny to them," says Dr. Brown in an article on www.washingtonpost.com. Much like the baby oil tanning craze of the 1970s and 1980s, applying something bright and shiny can attract the sun's rays. And, as we've come to learn, that's not a good thing for your skin.

But this isn't to say that you should toss the gloss. You can still wear shiny lip gloss; just make sure you put some other form of protection on underneath before you apply the glossy stuff. Any lip product with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15—SPF 30 is even better—is a good shield for your lips against the sun's damaging rays. And don't be afraid to reapply the sunscreen frequently, since activities such as talking, drinking, and licking your lips can cause it to wear off. Additionally, some cosmetic lip gloss products contain SPF 15 or SPF 30; just be sure to check the labels. As long as you make protection a key factor in your beauty regimen, you can have your lip gloss and wear it too.



For more information on your oral health, please contact the Massachusetts Dental Society at (800) 342-8747 or visit our Web site at www.massdental.org.

sun protection factor 💥



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