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Have (safe) fun in the sun

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by Susan Spencer

(excerpted from the June 2009 issue of *Sister 2 Sister* magazine)

Summertime might be when the living is easy, but fun in the sun has health risks. Follow these basic precautions and care tips to get the most out of summer—safely.

“The summer months are lumps and bumps and insect bites. It really has to do with being outdoors more,” said Dr. Brenda Geddis-Comrie, a family medicine physician at UMass Memorial Medical Center in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Fractures and sprains from bicycling, Rollerblading and skateboarding are all-too-common summer mishaps. Wearing a helmet and—for wheels underfoot—elbow, wrist and knee guards can prevent serious injuries and keep you in the game.

According to Dr. Roneet Lev, an emergency medicine physician at Scripps Mercy Hospital in San Diego, there are 400 heat-related deaths each year in the United States. When the temperature rises, drink extra water or sports drinks to keep your cool. Seek prompt medical attention if you feel weak, disoriented and nauseous, have a headache or muscle aches or a dry mouth.

While the sun might feel good after the cooler months, its ultraviolet rays are dangerous. “Sunburn and skin cancer can occur in all hues of skin,” said Dr. Charles Crutchfield III, a Minneapolis-area dermatologist. “In fact, the darkest hue of skin only provides an SPF of about 6 to 8.” Harmful rays still get through without protection, especially at midday. Apply a sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher an hour before going out in the sun and then reapply every hour. Make sure the sunscreen protects against cancer-causing UVA as well as burn-causing UVB waves. Sun-protective clothing and sunglasses also keep you covered.

Check out the June 2009 issue of *Sister 2 Sister* magazine to learn why you still need to be careful and apply sunscreen even when its cloudy.

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