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The Sun is Good – Go into the Sun to Prevent Prostate Cancer

Weighing the Risks: Sunbathing for Your Prostate? Don't Bother

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Spending long periods in the sun may significantly reduce a man's risk of prostate cancer, according to a study published in the June 15 issue of *Cancer Research*, but this does not suggest that men should take up sunbathing or lifeguarding for their health.

Sun exposure prompts the body to produce vitamin D, which is known to inhibit the growth of prostate cells. Using an instrument called a reflectometer, researchers measured the skin tones of 426 men with advanced prostate cancer and 455 cancer-free men, comparing unexposed underarm skin to sun-exposed skin on the forehead.

The researchers found that the darker a man's skin pigmentation (a measure of his sun exposure), the less likely he was to have prostate cancer. They also determined that certain genetic variations in the body's vitamin D receptors played roles in the development of prostate cancer.

Most dermatologists believe that no amount of sun exposure is safe because of the risk of skin cancer, and Dr. Esther John, the lead author on the study, does not recommend sitting in the sun. "The effects from supplements and sun exposure on vitamin D levels in the blood are the same," she says. "Supplement use would be a safer option than sun exposure."

Even though vitamin D is an essential nutrient for other reasons, especially for bone health, no one yet knows what level of the vitamin is effective in avoiding prostate cancer.

"Our findings need to be confirmed by other studies before specific recommendations can be given to the public regarding prostate cancer prevention," said Dr. John, an epidemiologist at the Northern California Cancer Center.