

## Old Habits Die Hard!

### Patients Continue Excessive Sun Exposure in Spite of Having Melanoma

The fact that ultraviolet radiation from the sun is carcinogenic and is a main cause of malignant melanoma has been well known among health professionals and in general population for almost 3 decades. Governmental agencies and patient organizations in many countries invested considerable resources in public campaigns aiming at the reduction of recreational sun exposure, in a vain hope to halt the steeply increasing curve of non-melanoma skin cancer and malignant melanoma. The individuals who have been treated for malignant melanoma should be particularly aware of the importance of excessive sunbathing and more cautious with relation to sun exposure. The current study of Idorn et al. shows that this is unfortunately not the case.

Below is a summary of a paper by Idorn et al. The full reference for the article is: *Idorn LW, Datta P, Heydenreich J, Philipsen PA, Wulf HC. A 3-Year Follow-up of Sun Behaviour in Patients With Cutaneous Malignant Melanoma. JAMA Dermatol 2013 Oct 2. doi: 10.1001/jamadermatol.2013.5098. [Epub ahead of print].*

Luise Idorn (see below) and coworkers analyzed in a prospective, controlled observational study the sun behaviour of patients with cutaneous malignant melanoma the first, second, and third summers after the diagnosis. Participants wore personal wristwatch dosimeters that continuously measured UV exposure. Sun behaviour and ultraviolet exposure pattern of the 20 patients with previous malignant melanoma was compared with the same number of age-, sex- and Fitzpatrick skin type-matched controls. Unexpectedly, patients daily UV dose increased 25% from the first to the second summer and 33% from the first to the third summer after diagnosis. The estimated increase was 0.3 SED (standard erythema dose) each year. The controls maintained a stable UV exposure. Another provoking observation was that despite the awareness of the deleterious effect of sunburns 50% of controls and 60% of patients were sunburned at least once during the study period.

This study uncovered a worrisome sun behaviour in patients treated for malignant melanoma. The sun protective behaviour is very short lived and within 3 years after the treatment, their sun exposure pattern is no different from the control population.

Apparently, sun behaviour mimics in many ways an addictive behaviour such as that of smokers. Despite the warning campaigns linking cancer to smoking and a convincing data showing that people diagnosed with early stage lung cancer can double their chances of survival if they stop smoking, more than 80% of lung cancer patients continue smoking after the diagnosis (Duffy et al. *Commun Oncol* 2012, 9: 344-52). Patients with a history of malignant melanoma are likely to develop another melanoma within the 5 years after the first tumor and it is likely that the disregard to sun protection is an important contributor. Unfortunately, the study of Idorn et al. underscores the sad truth that rational arguments cannot change human behaviour.

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After acquiring the medical degree in 2006 from the University of Copenhagen in Denmark, Luise Idorn completed 2 years of internal medicine, surgery and dermatology. Due to a great interest in the association of UVR exposure with cutaneous malignant melanoma, she started doing research with a focus on sun behaviour in patients with cutaneous malignant melanoma. She received her PhD in 2013 from the University of Copenhagen and continues her work within this research field.