



YOUNG ADULTS & CANCER

By Terra Dafoe, M.A. PhD Student, Counselling Psychology Program
Program Leader, Wellspring You Can Connect Program

Being diagnosed with cancer as a young adult is different.



Cancer is not generally thought of as something that happens to young adults. But it does. Approximately 7,000 young Canadians from the ages of 18-39 are diagnosed

with cancer each year (1). While there is generally significant funding and attention given to children and older adults living with cancer in Canada, young adults can be considered an underserved group of Canadians with cancer.

Research and experience shows that having cancer as a young adult is unique in a number of significant ways.

IDENTITY

Young adulthood is a time of independence, when one's sense of identity and priorities come into their own. At this time many young adults are entering post-secondary education, beginning careers, or moving out on their own; all major transitions towards autonomy. A cancer diagnosis introduces unexpected issues into their lives at this time when most of their peers are enjoying blossoming independence. Suddenly they are confronted with their own mortality, when their peers are barely giving it a second thought, and their newly-found independence is retracted. Often, they might find themselves moving back in with their parents, delaying their education, and perhaps even delaying their dreams. Cancer has now become a HUGE part of their identity.

RELATIONSHIPS

While a cancer diagnosis at any age can complicate relationships with family, friends, partners, etc., it becomes specifically complicated for a young adult. Young adulthood is when serious intimate relationships often begin, and marriages take place or

are contemplated. It is one thing to cope with cancer after marriage, but quite another before. How do they share their diagnosis with potential partners? Can their partners handle the uncertainty, or the focus on serious health problems or treatment schedules? What about intimacy? The common reality of hair loss, weight gain, low energy and medical equipment (i.e., a colostomy bag) may not be conducive to feeling desirable. Going to bed with a colostomy bag, or waking up throughout the night to be sick, complicates sexual intimacy.

What about children? Young adulthood is also the prime period for starting a family. How do parents tell a young child that his/her mom or dad has cancer? There are likely to be overwhelming feelings of anxiousness and guilt as they worry whether or not they are going to be present for their child's "firsts" throughout their lifetime. Raising a child is complex on its own but this complexity becomes even greater when a young parent is living with cancer.

FERTILITY

For some young adults with cancer, treatment can either temporarily or permanently affect their fertility (2). A cancer diagnosis may force some young adults to confront their future parenthood before it has been fully considered. All of a sudden they find themselves asking some seriously tough questions. For instance, do they want children? Will they be able to have them post-treatment? If they have the option before their treatment begins, there are fertility preservation options available.* However, depending on where they live and their resources, these options can end up being rather limited.

ISOLATION

The support of family and friends is invaluable; however, it may be difficult for them to relate to their loved one's experience of living with cancer as a young adult.



YOUNG ADULTS & CANCER CONT'D

By Terra Dafoe, M.A. PhD Student, Counselling Psychology Program
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Isolation may be among the most common and most difficult issues for young adults with cancer. Family and friends may not understand how it feels to be the youngest person by many years in the waiting room, or the only person in their university year that is sick to their stomach everyday, not due to youthful indulgence, but because of cancer treatment. Young adulthood is supposed to be a period in life filled with carefree living and fun. However, the experiences of many young adults living with cancer do not fit this description. There are probably not many people in their lives who truly understand, and this can be incredibly isolating.

Fortunately, there is a growing awareness that being a young adult with cancer is different. Young adult support groups are popping up in major cities across Canada. They range from informal social groups created by young adults who have identified the need to connect, to more structured support groups and information programs offered by local organizations. Many young adults have advocated for support of the recognition that the experience of being a young adult with cancer is different. Due to the dedication and passion of many of these young survivors, the young adult cancer community is coming together. So to all the young adults out there: reach out and connect to the community. There are other young adults living with cancer, and they get it, because they have cancer too.

For more information about the issue of fertility, visit the **Fertile Future website at <http://fertilefuture.ca>.*

Fertile Future is committed to informing, educating, and assisting with fertility preservation for young adults with cancer. ■

1. Canadian Cancer Society, *Canadian Cancer Statistics, 2010*
2. *Ibid.*

HOW TO CONNECT...

You Can Connect - Midtown Toronto
You Can Connect - Downtown Toronto

COMING SOON!

- www.facebook.com/youcanconnect
- Rightfully named. Wellspring's You Can Connect program is a space for young adults between the ages of 18 and 39 who are living with cancer. It's an opportunity to get together and chat, explore, learn and be social. Guest experts are invited to address topics of interests. Please visit the You Can Connect Facebook page or the Wellspring website for meeting information about the program in Toronto. Not in the Toronto area? Join the growing online community by checking out the Facebook page.

Young Adult Cancer Canada (YACC)

- www.youngadultcancer.ca
- YACC is a national organization for all things young adult cancer related. Its mission is to build a community of young adults diagnosed with cancer that provides information, support, skills and opportunity. Its website has links to information, other survivors, and a number of activities designed specifically for young adults with cancer including: Retreat Yourself, Survive and Thrive Expeditions, Survivor Conference, the "We Get It" video series, Localife, and Shave for the Brave, to name a few. To get connected, visit the site.

Rethink Breast Cancer

- www.rethinkbreastcancer.com
- Rethink Breast Cancer is a charity that brings bold, relevant awareness to women under the age of 40 living with breast cancer. Rethink fosters a new generation of young and influential breast cancer supporters, and responds to the unique needs of young adult women living with breast cancer. To learn more about Rethink, please visit the site above.

Gilda's Club Greater Toronto

- www.gildasclubtoronto.org
- Gilda's Club Greater Toronto is a supportive community where men, women, teens and children with cancer – along with their families and friends – can join with others to build social and emotional support, amongst other things. They have a Young Carers Program for young adults that meet twice a month on Thursdays. Check out the link above for more information.

My Diagnosis of Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia

By Raymund Ong



I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) in October of 2008. I was 20 years old. As a result of the chemotherapy treatment I received, I became paralyzed on my entire left side and was forced to withdraw from my second year at the University of Guelph. Being young and diagnosed with both a disease and disability provided challenges to me that I could never have imagined. I was an in-patient at Princess Margaret Hospital for 48 days. They released me when I could walk with a modified cane, though it took great effort. My two year ordeal of medication, hospital appointments, illness, pain and mental and physical exhaustion was overwhelming.

The isolation from my friends was an added torment, for many of them simply did not know what to say to me and waited for me to contact them. With the exception of a few friends and my mother, I fought my cancer battle alone. I eventually found out about a few general support groups for all age groups, but it wasn't until I felt I truly needed them and had to ask the hospital for information. Even after I attended a few of the support programs in the community, I felt isolated once again because I was significantly younger than most of the other people diagnosed in the group. It wasn't until months later that I found out about support programs for the specific issues facing young adults living with cancer. I wish that I had known about these programs sooner, however, I was never informed of them. This needs to change. ■



Food Safety and You!

By Lynda Kuhn, SVP Communications, Maple Leaf Foods Inc.

Safe Snacking for Higher-Risk Canadians

Preparing and eating three meals a day can be overwhelming for people living with cancer. Between doctors' appointments and cancer treatments, it is not only hard to find the time to prepare nutritionally-balanced meals but also to find the energy to prepare meals. Eating smaller snacks throughout the day can be a great way to get the nutrients your body needs, and to help curb the side effects of cancer treatments.

When undergoing cancer treatments, your immune system can become weaker, which makes it more difficult to clear infection and other foreign agents from the body. As a result, chemotherapy, radiation, and some medications may make you more vulnerable to food borne illness, so it is especially important to take extra care when handling, preparing, and eating food.

Everyone has a role to play when it comes to food safety

Canada has stringent regulations* in place to make sure the food we buy is free of contamination and safe to eat. Any business that produces or sells food—from farmers, food processors to supermarkets, delis, butchers, and restaurants—must meet these standards.**

According to Health Canada, Canada's food supply is one of the safest in the world, but there are still 11 to 13 million cases of food borne illness across the country each year. Many cases go unreported because the symptoms resemble other digestive illnesses. Food borne illness is usually not long lasting, but in some cases it can be severe, particularly among people who have weakened immune systems, such as those undergoing cancer treatments.

As a cancer patient, the last thing you want to worry about is the safety of your food. By following simple food safety advice and avoiding higher-risk foods, you can minimize your exposure to food borne illness!

Higher-risk foods

Some foods are riskier to eat for people being treated for cancer, because of how they are made and the conditions in which they are stored. Some are only safe to eat when they are fully cooked. Foods that present a higher-risk of food borne illness and should be avoided in a raw or semi-cooked state include:

- Raw fish and shellfish
- Deli meats, unless reheated to steaming hot
- Raw or unpasteurized cow or goat milk or foods made from unpasteurized milk
- Soft cheeses
- Raw or lightly cooked egg or egg products
- Raw meat or under-cooked poultry
- Raw sprouts
- Unpasteurized fruit juice and cider

Safe Snacking

Always take the time to properly prepare healthy snacks and safely pack snacks you will be enjoying while on the go. Bacteria may be lurking in hidden places or start to grow in food that is not stored properly. Bacteria in food can double every 20 minutes at room temperature. If cooked and/or perishable food has been left out for longer than two hours, throw it away! Other tips include:

- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly under cool running water before eating.
- Always wash the outer rind of fruits such as oranges and melons - bacteria can easily transfer from the peel to the inner fruit.
- Fruit juice, dairy-based dips, yogurt, cheese snacks and deli sandwiches can become unsafe to eat if they are not stored at the right temperature - always refrigerate within two hours.
- Use an ice pack to store cold foods and insulated bags or boxes to keep foods at the correct temperature while on the go.

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Food Safety and You! CONT'D

By Lynda Kuhn, SVP Communications, Maple Leaf Foods Inc.

- Freeze a juice box or small container of yogurt that will thaw by snack time.
- Use a thermos to keep hot foods hot.

Minimizing your risk to food borne illness depends on the food you eat, how well you store it, and how carefully you prepare it. Remember to snack safely and follow these simple steps to protect your health!

For more information about food safety for people living with cancer visit EatSafe! <http://foodsafety.cpha.ca/>. The website was developed by the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) in partnership with Maple Leaf Foods Inc.

Maple Leaf Foods is committed to becoming a global leader in food safety and is actively engaged in food safety education. The Company works with industry stakeholders to improve consumer understanding of food safety and to educate higher-risk Canadians. To read Maple Leaf's Food Safety Pledge, visit: www.mapleleafpledge.com ■

*<http://inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/concen/concengov/gouverne.shtml>

**<http://inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/concen/concenind/induste.shtml>



FOOD SAFETY TIPS

Simple steps you can take to reduce your risk of food borne illness:

CLEAN

Wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before preparing and eating food.

- Meat and produce carry bacteria responsible for food borne illness.
- Prevent bacteria from spreading by sanitizing countertops and cutting boards, and washing kitchen dish cloths regularly.

SEPARATE

Stop bacteria from spreading by separating raw foods from cooked foods when preparing meals.

- Avoid cross-contamination by using two cutting boards – one for fresh produce, and one for raw meat and seafood.

COOK

Never use your nose, eyes or taste buds to judge the safety of food.

- Eliminate harmful bacteria by cooking foods thoroughly and always use a meat thermometer to check the internal temperature of meats, egg dishes, casseroles, and other foods and leftovers, to be sure they are cooked safely.
- The interior temperature of meat when properly cooked should be 74°C (165°F).

CHILL

The Danger Zone where food borne bacteria can grow the most is between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F).

- Bacteria in food can double every 20 minutes at room temperature.
- Refrigerate perishable foods, prepared foods and leftovers within two hours of purchase or serving.
- Discard food left at room temperature longer than two hours.

RULE OF THUMB FOR DELI MEATS

- Unopened packaged deli meats- keep for two weeks.
- Opened packaged deli meats – keep for three to five days.
- Deli meats sliced at retail store – keep for three to five days.

BEST BEFORE DATES

- Indicates high quality, not food safety.
- Once opened, the 'best before' date no longer applies.



Cancer and Financial Hardship: The Real Reality

By Pamela Bowes, M. Ed., Manager, Program Development, Wellspring

Every week at the Wellspring ‘Money Matters’ Program, there are personal stories shared from cancer patients who are facing two challenging journeys at the same time –cancer treatment and money problems.

Many people naively believe that “the government” will be there to provide for them when they become sick and need financial support to pay their bills. Or, that their resources such as savings and Registered Savings Plans (RSP), will help them endure. However, the actual lived experience is vastly different from the perception.

Firstly, there are only so many income replacement programs available to people who are too sick to work. There are basically four categories:

- **Asset-tested programs** such as Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program (or similar provincial programs if outside Ontario). For both of these programs, the main eligibility criterion is having liquid assets (e.g., cash, saving accounts, value of home or car) below a specific level. Many are shocked to learn that assets must be below \$7,500 for a couple applying to Ontario Disability, and the monthly payment is a just over \$1,600.
- **Contribution programs** such as Employment Insurance and Canada Pension Plan (CPP). Most employees pay into these programs through payroll deductions. Employment Insurance Sick Benefits pays a maximum of \$468/week, and the average CPP Disability Pension is just over \$800/month.
- **Employer-based Programs** such as Short Term and Long Term Disability (LTD).
- **Personal assets** – these are unique to each person, and could include savings, RSP, property, critical illness insurance.

Although there may appear to be several options, there are specific details about each program which, when combined with a personal situation, eliminate

options and make the rest more confusing. That is why many cancer patients feel that financial security is like navigating a maze.

The asset-tested programs pay a monthly entitlement that is well below what is considered a low income, or poverty level, in Canada. A single disabled person living with cancer would have to survive on just \$1,000 per month. Any money received from any other source is deducted from their entitlement, so there is no ability to get further ahead financially.

Employment Insurance is often the first program that people access when they leave work due to illness. Some of the drawbacks include the 6 to 8 week wait period for the first payment to arrive; the program pays a maximum of 15 weeks (even if they are going to be sick for much longer) and pays a maximum of \$468/wk. In addition, that payment becomes taxable income.

CPP Disability Pension has a very strict definition of disability. Almost half of the people who apply are turned down because they do not meet the definition of ‘disability’. Even when eligible, the waiting time is roughly 4 to 6 months before a person would receive his/her first payment.

Some employees have short term and/or long term disability through their employer. It is a great benefit to have. However, more than 60% of people working in Canada do not have these benefits. Moreover, if they do, the majority of LTD policies pay about 67% of the previous income.

Given the restrictions to these programs, many people are left to rely solely on their own financial resources to weather the financial impact of cancer. However, the vast majority of people in Canada have debts greater than their assets, and many have savings that might cover them for just a short time, maybe only one month.

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Cancer and Financial Hardship: The Real Reality **CONT'D**

By Pamela Bowes, M. Ed., Manager, Program Development, Wellspring

“Managing my cancer and treatments was hard, trying to figure out my financial options and dealing with the government was much harder”.

~ Wellspring Member who accessed Money Matters Program

The reality for most cancer patients is that cancer causes some degree of financial hardship. The “bottom line” on the income replacement system is:

- The income replacement programs are limited, and most people are ineligible for some, or all of them.
- There are no income replacement programs that pay the same amount as a person’s pre-disability earnings. Therefore, he/she will have a decrease in income. For some, the decrease can be small and manageable by utilizing savings but for others it is quite significant. For many people, the lost income over the course of a year can be 50% or even more.
- Every income program – including Employment Insurance, Long Term Disability, Ontario Disability – also consider all other income recipients receive, and will deduct that income from what they are given.

After working with many people in need, the following “truths” have become evident:

- First, is that people only pay attention to the message that cancer causes financial hardship when they are already in the situation. There are only a few people who actually think about how they will financially survive if they become too sick to work.
- Second, there could not be a more difficult time to manage money concerns and to navigate through government programs than when people are sick. Patients are stressed, feeling ill, struggling to survive the complex treatments and hospital journeys as well as trying to hold their life together for their loved ones. Money concerns only furthers the complications in these people’s lives.

So is there something that can be done? Yes.

- Firstly, as a suggestion, people should start thinking “if they got sick tomorrow, do they know what they are entitled to and how will they survive financially?” If people do not know, they should take the time to figure it out.
- Secondly, people should start saving for a rainy day. Almost 30% of people under the age of 65 will require more than 90 days away from work due to an illness. Many people do not think it will ever happen to them – but they should be prepared that it will.
- Lastly, tell a friend or family member to think about this topic. If one person can reach someone else, teach them to be prepared so they do not have to learn the hard way, and they have made a difference. ■

To learn more about government programs, visit Service Canada at www.servicecanada.gc.ca and go to the ‘People with Disabilities’ section or call 1.800.277.9914.

Author - Pamela is the Manager of the Wellspring Money Matters. She has been with Wellspring as a part-time Money Matters leader since 2002, and full time staff since 2008. Pamela has spent over 20 years helping ill people to navigate the maze of income replacement programs when too sick to work. Recently, she has started to train social workers at hospitals across the province to increase their knowledge of financial options so they can better help their patients.

To learn more about the Money Matters program, visit: www.wellspring.ca

Sun Protection 101

By Dr. Lisa M. Kellett, MD, FRCPC, DABD - DLK On Avenue - Member of the Canadian Dermatology Association
www.dlkonavenue.com Foreword by: Marsha Wallace, Program Coordinator, Wellspring



Whether in the summer or wintertime, the sun can always help to make the day fun and exciting. The sun provides the best source of Vitamin D (which at the very least is integral to strengthening bones and fighting infection). However, overexposure to the sun can also have negative consequences. It is important when outdoors to be aware of how to protect the skin. The skin is the largest organ of the human body and therefore should be protected to prevent premature aging, sun damage, burns or skin diseases such as skin cancer. Although many people tend to expose more skin in the summer months, there should always be precautions taken to protect the skin all throughout the year. While it is beneficial to enjoy the sun, it is important to do so in moderation.

There are a myriad of ways to protect the skin from sun damage. Below are 10 of the most important:

1. BROAD PROTECTION FIRST AND FOREMOST

Sun protection is the most important skincare product and should be applied first. Apply a broad spectrum of sunscreen immediately after cleansing in the morning. Allow for approximately five minutes to settle into the skin (any make up should be applied afterwards). Wearing sunscreen with SPF30 (Sun Protection Factor) or higher is recommended as it protects from the sun, and prevents photo-aging. As a guide for the body, use the same amount of sunscreen product that can fill 3 tablespoons.

2. CONSULT WITH A DOCTOR OR PHARMACIST IF TAKING MEDICATION

If medication is currently being taken, consider checking with a doctor or pharmacist, as some prescription drugs can cause photosensitivity and increase the risk of burning.

3. LOOK FOR MAXIMUM EYE PROTECTION

Look for durable sunglasses that offer 100 percent UVA (ultraviolet radiation of relatively long wavelengths) and UVB (ultraviolet radiation of relatively short wavelengths) protection. Sunglasses can help prevent ocular damage that can lead to cataracts later in life.

4. CAUTION WHILE DRIVING

When driving around, keep a long-sleeved white shirt in the car to wear for added sun protection – especially when stuck in traffic. Glass does not filter

out some UV rays so it's best to ensure that the skin is always protected.

5. NO TAN IS A GOOD TAN

Not only does the sun cause skin cancer, it also promotes premature aging. A tan is the skin's protective response to injury by UV light, therefore by tanning the skin, it is being damaged.

6. SUN PROTECTION IS REQUIRED ALL YEAR

Wearing sunscreen is necessary all year and should be used even on cloudy days as up to 80% of the sun's rays can pass through, even when it's raining. It should also be worn when swimming as water does not filter out the UV light and can risk skin damage, sun burn and skin cancer. Sunscreen is also required on a sunny day in the winter, especially if there is snow on the ground as the sun can reflect off it. The effects of sun exposure do not change with temperature.

7. A SUNBURN IS THE WORST ENEMY

Sunburns should always be avoided as they have been linked to cause skin cancer later in life. If a burn does occur, consult a dermatologist as soon as possible as they will be able to prescribe medication to reduce the damage of the burn. Stay out of the sun until the burn heals, and keep the skin clean, cool and well hydrated.

8. VITAMIN D COMES IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES

If there is a concern about lacking vitamin D in the body, consider taking an oral supplement. Oral supplements are a safer method than tanning under the sun or at a salon and can provide a healthy dosage each day.

9. KEEP COVERED AND LOOK FOR SHADE

Avoid being in the sun during peak hours (10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.) and seek out the shade whenever possible. Always wear a sun hat with at least a five inch brim with a wider brim in the front to protect the neck and chest.

10. GET A SECOND AND PROFESSIONAL OPINION

As the body changes over time, it is important to be diligent in informing a health expert about if noticeable changes appear, even if they seem minor. UV radiation is the leading cause of skin cancer therefore it is imperative to take the time to get examined by a dermatologist if there is a concern. ■

Skin Cancers

By Drs. Anatoli Freiman, MD, FRCPC & Benjamin Barankin, MD, FRCPC
 Toronto Dermatology Centre - Members of the Canadian Dermatology Association
www.torontodermatologycentre.com



Skin cancer is the most prevalent of all types of human cancers. Fair-skinned people who sunburn easily are at a particularly high risk for developing skin cancer.

Other less important factors include repeated medical and industrial X-ray exposure, scarring from diseases or burns, occupational exposure to compounds such as coal tar and arsenic, and family history of skin cancer.

Actinic Keratoses (AK): The Earliest Skin Cancer

Actinic keratoses are considered the earliest stage in the development of skin cancer. Proper use of sunscreens can help prevent actinic keratoses even after extensive sun damage has already occurred.

Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC)

Basal cell carcinoma is the most common type of skin cancer and appears frequently on the head, neck, and hands as a small, fleshy bump. Other parts of the body may be affected as well.

Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC)

Squamous cell carcinoma is the second most common skin cancer; it is primarily found in fair-skinned people and rarely in dark-skinned individuals.

Malignant Melanoma (MM)

Malignant melanoma is the most destructive of all skin cancers. Melanoma is less common than other skin cancers. However, it is much more dangerous and causes the majority (75%) of deaths related to skin cancer.

Warning signs of melanoma include:

- Changes in the surface of a mole.

- Scaling, oozing, bleeding, or the appearance of a new bump.
- Spread of pigment from the border of a mole into surrounding skin.
- Change in sensation including itchiness, tenderness, or pain.

The ABCDEs of Melanoma: when to worry about moles

Asymmetry - One-half doesn't match the other half in size, shape, color, or thickness.

Border irregularity - The edges are ragged, scalloped, or poorly defined.

Color - The pigmentation is not uniform. Shades of tan, brown, and black are present. Dashes of red, white, and blue add to the mottled appearance.

Diameter - While melanomas are usually greater than 6mm in diameter (the size of a pencil eraser) when diagnosed, they can be smaller. If you notice a mole different from others, or which changes, itches, or bleeds (even if it is small), you should see a dermatologist.

Evolution - The most important alerting sign is evolution or change in moles

Treatment of Skin Cancer

If a skin biopsy reveals cancer, the dermatologist has an array of medical and surgical procedures as treatment, depending upon the type of cancer, its location, and the needs of the individual.

Dermatologic surgical treatments include electrodesiccation and curettage (ED&C) that involves alternately scraping or burning the tumor in combination with low levels of electricity, surgical excision, cryosurgery (freezing using liquid nitrogen), and Mohs micrographic surgery. Other dermatologic treatments include radiation therapy and topical chemotherapy.

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Skin Cancers CONT'D

By Drs. Anatoli Freiman MD, FRCPC & Benjamin Barankin, MD FRCPC
Toronto Dermatology Centre - Members of the Canadian Dermatology Association



Early Detection is the Surest Way to a Cure

Develop a regular routine to inspect your body for any skin changes. If a growth, mole, sore, or skin discoloration appears suddenly, or begins to change, see a dermatologist. It is wise to have an annual skin examination by a dermatologist, especially for adults with lots of moles, significant past sun exposure or a family history of skin cancer.

The Best Defense - Sun Avoidance

Overexposure to ultraviolet light (sunlight or tanning lamps), especially if it results in sunburn and blistering, is the main cause of skin cancer. Seek shade if possible between 10 am - 4 pm when the sun's rays are most intense. Wear light-colored, tightly-woven, protective clothing like long sleeves and pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses. Wear a sunscreen with both UVA & UVB protection, ideally with an SPF of 30 or more. Reapply sunscreen every 2-3 hours when in the sun and always after sweating or water exposure. ■

