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## Reporter shares her battle with skin cancer

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**LEE COUNTY:** The warm winters and sunny skies are among Southwest Florida's strongest selling points. But spending too much time outdoors can have dangerous consequences. NBC2 reporter Kate Eckman shares her personal story of dealing with the consequences, so others can learn from her mistakes.

Like many people, reporter Kate Eckman loves the sun, the beach and being outdoors.

"It feels good to lie out and be warmed by the sun and have it tan our skin," said Eckman.

She says as a teen she never thought basking in the sun and bronzing her skin could be so destructive, so ugly.

"I'm kicking myself now because I know better. But as a younger person and as a teenager it was all about just being tan," said Eckman.

Eckman says that meant not always wearing sunscreen.

"I was stupid and I admit that," said Eckman.

Her countless hours in the sun, sometimes unprotected, caught up with her, but she didn't even realize it.

"I had this red mark on my forehead and I just thought it was nothing," said Eckman.

"I was home over Thanksgiving with my family, had no makeup on. My brother, who's a doctor, said, 'What is that on your forehead?' And he's examining me like doctors do. And he said, 'I think you have skin cancer.' I said, 'I don't have skin cancer,'" said Eckman.

She went to Riverchase Dermatology in Naples to find out for sure.

"They took a biopsy and a week later they called me and sure enough I had skin cancer," said Eckman.

A week later, her dermatologist performed Mohs surgery to remove the cancer.

It was imperative she got it taken care of right away because the cancer could have spread to her nerves and lymph nodes.

"We don't really know if it's a sun exposure at a young age or a burn that predisposes versus chronic sun exposure over a number of years," said Dr. Andrew Jaffe of Riverchase Dermatology.

Jaffe, who performs about ten Mohs surgeries a day, says this specialized treatment offers the highest cure rate.

His patients are normally in their mid-60s.

"Your type of skin cancer, basal cell, is more uncommon in the younger population, but certainly not unheard of," said Jaffe.

"I couldn't believe I had skin cancer. I thought that just happens to people who are much, much older than me," said Eckman. "Having my head sliced open and having cancer taken out of my face. It just doesn't seem....I wasn't prepared for it."

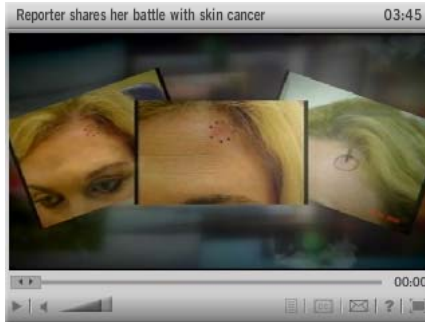
Jaffe says skin cancer is preventable and curable when caught early.

"You want to be out and enjoying yourself, but you just have to be smart about the exposure you get," said Jaffe.

"Let me be your lesson. Don't wait until you have skin cancer before you say, oh I need to protect myself, I'll wear sunblock. Do it now," said Eckman.

She says she may not love the scar on her forehead, but it keeps her in check.

"Every day I look in the mirror and it's a reminder to put that sunscreen on," said Eckman.



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To help prevent skin cancer, Dr. Jaffe recommends you:

- Wear sunblock containing zinc and titanium everyday
- Wear a hat and protective clothing
- Avoid being outside during peak sun hours
- Seek shade if possible.
- Get an annual skin check by a dermatologist.

If you notice something changing on your skin or a mole has grown, don't be afraid to go to the doctor. Jaffe says the sooner you see a doctor, the less likely it will be bad news.

[Click here to learn more about skin cancer from the American Cancer Society.](#)

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