



Joanna M. Nicolay Melanoma Foundation
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Got Skin? Get Checked!

“And, Often,” as this article title directs triathletes. This is the emphatic mission of the Joanna M. Nicolay Melanoma Foundation (JMNMF) – to protect the body’s largest, perhaps most underappreciated organ from its number one enemy – the sun. Although the Foundation was very busy with outreach and education during May, which is National Melanoma Awareness Month, its supporters know that constant “awareness” in the triathlete community is definitely needed. Melanoma is the most serious and lethal form of skin cancer and triathletes lead the pack as a key demographic for over-exposure to the sun’s extremely harmful ultraviolet rays. During the past ten years, the number of cases of melanoma increased more rapidly than any other cancer, with a 1 in 39 lifetime risk of developing melanoma.

When you think of skin cancer you may ask, “What’s the big deal? Don’t they just remove it?” While the skin has pigment-producing melanocytes to protect it, the sun’s rays are especially damning to the skin’s middle layer, the dermis. No amount of “tan” or pigmentation will protect the skin because the damaging rays penetrate deeply, causing cumulative damage. Triathletes need to know the startling facts that melanoma is:

- *the most common cancer among young adults ages 20-30,*
- *the primary cause of cancer death for women ages 25-30; and,*
- *the second most common cause of cancer death for women ages 30-35.*

Very early melanomas, considered Stage I, are thin. The chances of it spreading are low if it is caught because the melanoma has not grown deeply enough into the skin to allow the cancerous cells to break away and spread. The treatment is to have the affected mole surgically removed along with a surrounding border of healthy tissue, which is called a “wide local excision.” As long as your doctor is sure that enough tissue was removed, that is all the treatment you need.

Stage II and III melanomas are more likely to spread to other parts of the body because the cancerous cells have grown deeper into the skin. Doctors describe Stage II melanomas as having a “moderate” or “intermediate” risk of returning or spreading to another part of the body after they have been removed. Stage III melanomas have a higher risk of recurrence, because the melanoma cells have spread into the skin, lymph vessels, or lymph glands close to the melanoma, and may be carried to other parts of the body in the bloodstream or lymph fluid.

Holly Gannoe, age 38, started competing in triathlons in 2001. In 2005 she was diagnosed with Stage III nodular melanoma. Celebrating four years now as a melanoma survivor, she participated in the Foundation’s 2008 “TRI-TO-WIN” SavageMan Triathlon Festival. Holly emphasizes, “Sun-safe practices in training and competition are extremely important. Not only do we tend to spend the bulk of our training and racing time during peak sun-exposure times, but the exercise leaves our immune systems somewhat weakened post-workout. Both sun exposure and a weakened immune system are identified as factors in the development of melanoma and other skin cancers.” Holly is currently training with Team Z for her longest triathlon yet, Ironman Lake Placid this July.

“TRI-TO-WIN” Events – the triathlon fundraising arm of the Joanna M. Nicolay Melanoma Foundation – produces a variety of triathlons to not only raise needed education, advocacy, and research funds, but to reach the triathlete demographic and their active families. From a kids’ triathlon and pool sprint in central Maryland to the “TRI-TO-WIN” SavageMan Triathlon Festival in western Maryland at Deep Creek Lake State Park each September, the full



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spectrum of triathletes are targeted to enhance their awareness of melanoma and the importance of embracing sun-safe practices.

Brock Yetso, Executive Director for the Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults, stated, “The UCF and my family have both personally lost close friends to this deadly disease. Although the SavageMan Triathlon was a painful way to spend our Sunday morning – we couldn’t think of a better way to fight a SAVAGE disease. Kudos to “TRI-TO-WIN” events for putting on a great race, and I encourage anyone who is up for a great race, or who is savage enough to fight this savage cancer, to join us again next year.”

Ask 13-time Hawaii Ironman, Tom Shinnars, and he will tell you of his ordeal as a Stage III melanoma survivor who ignored some early signs of the disease. Detected too late, the melanoma had spread to his lymph nodes. Being the competitor that he is, Tom battled through surgery and a year of interferon treatment. Just a few months after completing his treatment, Tom competed in an Ironman competition and once again qualified and finished the Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii. Now melanoma-free for nearly six years, Tom looks forward to many more trips to Kona.

However, Tom’s success story in his battle against melanoma is one that, sadly, is not repeated often enough. One person dies every hour in the U.S. from melanoma. According to Greg Safko, Race Director for “TRI-TO-WIN” Events, “We’re making inroads, gaining visibility, and reaching critical mass with our triathlons and their primary purposes, to raise funds and build awareness. Melanoma is the only cancer for *which incidence and mortality are rising unabated, yet it only receives 2.5% of the funding* of the National Cancer Institute. Our race fees are tax-deductible to athletes, sponsors, and supporters – we are not a ‘for-profit’ organization that donates a portion of profits to a charity – we are the charity and 100% of all proceeds go to the cause! That’s a huge difference, and “TRI-TO-WIN” athletes should feel very proud of their involvement.”

Marc Applegate, another SavageMan triathlete, was diagnosed with melanoma 15 years ago at age 26. He went to a dermatologist because a dark freckle on his cheek became more noticeable, had it removed and tested, and it was found malignant. A plastic surgeon proceeded to take an additional 1-centimeter diameter section of skin around where the freckle was to confirm a safe border; visits to the dermatologist for a screening one or two times a year are now “required.” According to Marc, “I use sunscreen very consistently when I know I’m going to be out in the sun for extended periods of time. I have been cancer-free ever since...and I know that applying sunscreen “before” and intermittently (at least every hour) during my long training outings and races definitely helps minimize chances of getting too much sun. I like the motto, ‘Life is short, play hard,’ but perhaps if we play hard ‘safely,’ we will live longer!”

Since “TRI-TO-WIN” Events launched in 2006, the triathlons have raised over \$125,000. One significant outcome is the Foundation’s ability to increase research funding by 400% in 2009, expanding from Johns Hopkins research initiatives to four institutions across the U.S. It has also grown its educational outreach programs for all key stakeholders, triathletes, youth, and the general public. *With over one million new cases of skin cancer occurring in the U.S., alarmingly higher than all other cancers combined*, there’s much more to do!

Martha Carpenter, who completed her first Ironman in Louisville this past September, is another melanoma survivor and two-time “TRI-TO-WIN” triathlete, “My experience at the first Savageman really touched my heart. There were so many genuinely nice people working on this event, and so many strong athletes who found it worth their time to raise money for “my” cancer. I felt a sense of protection and comfort that I really cannot explain – until the bike course, that is! Even if I am the last one in, triathlon reminds me that I’m still in the game.”



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So, what can triathletes do for protection? Simple. When training or racing, make sure to follow sun safe practices:

- Do not burn: Ultraviolet light from the sun and tanning beds causes skin cancer.
- Generously apply sunscreen to all exposed skin using an SPF of at least 15. Re-apply every two hours, even on cloudy days, and after swimming or continuous sweating.
- Wear protective clothing, a hat or visor, and sunglasses.
- Seek shade when appropriate, remembering that the sun's rays are the strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Use extra caution near water, as it reflects the damaging rays of the sun, which can increase your chances of sunburn.
- Early detection of melanoma can save your life. Carefully examine all of your skin once a month.

All "TRI-TO-WIN" race registration fees, "Champion" contributions on triathletes' behalf, and sponsorships are tax-deductible, because the Joanna M. Nicolay Melanoma Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity. The Joanna M. Nicolay Melanoma Foundation's mission is to provide education, advocacy, and research to battle melanoma as the "voice for melanoma prevention, detection, care, and cure." More information on "TRI-TO-WIN" Events or Foundation initiatives is available at www.melanomaresource.org; you can also call the JMNMF office, (410) 857-4890.

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