

# Dorset Street

## DERMATOLOGY

### MEET MITCHELL SCHWARTZ, MD



**M**itchell Schwartz, MD, was walking on a beach this past summer when he spotted an umbrella in the distance. Dr. Schwartz, a dermatologist, is always pleased to see people protecting their skin from the sun. But as he neared, he realized that the figure relaxing in the umbrella's shade was a dog; its tanned owner was lying a few feet away on a blanket, in full sun. Though disappointed, Dr. Schwartz was not surprised.

"It's taking a long time to change behaviors," he says, noting the push by doctors to educate people on the very real dangers of too much sun exposure. "Most younger people don't really care about skin cancer so much, but when I talk about how much older they'll look from sun damage, how much coarser the skin will be, and how much more wrinkled and leathery, as well as how hard it can be to reverse that later on, they tend to listen." ▶



Above: Advanced skin care products. Right, from top: Christina and Stacey in the reception area. The friendly staff at Dorset Street Dermatology. Moles often require closer examination.



### Spreading the Word

Getting the word out about skin cancer prevention is paramount to Dr. Schwartz's practice, Dorset Street Dermatology. He began conducting free one-day clinics when he first opened a dermatology office, nearly three decades ago in Manchester, New Hampshire. He'd hold the clinics a couple of times a year as a goodwill gesture to the community and to get his name out to the public. In 1985, the American Academy of Dermatology decided to do something similar on a national level and enlisted members to volunteer. Screenings across the country were scheduled for one week in May, which is Skin Cancer Awareness month; since then, Dr. Schwartz has participated annually in the event, reportedly the only Vermont dermatologist to do so. He's even in the 2009 Guinness World Records book for doing the most skin cancer screenings in a single day, as part of that year's AAD screening week!



The message must be getting through, if slowly. The days when the majority of Dr. Schwartz's patients were senior citizens are over. Now, patients of all ages come in for regular skin checks, often after conducting them on themselves.

"I'm really impressed with how often a patient will come in and say, 'I have this mole and it's changing,'" says Dr. Schwartz. "And I'll look at it, and it doesn't look dramatically bad, like cancer, but it doesn't look normal either. It's often the first time I've seen it, but I'll almost always biopsy it, and I'm surprised how often it's a precancerous mole." That's key, he explains, because those kinds of growths have a higher likelihood of turning into melanoma, which can be fatal.

Other times, a patient will come in with something he or she wants looked at; it turns out to be nothing, but Dr. Schwartz will notice something else that does bear closer examination. "People will say, 'The sun never shines there. How could I have cancer?'" he says. "But that's what we're trying to teach people: statistically, these growths can occur any place on the body."

But the sun continues to cause the most avoidable damage. Dr. Schwartz wants people to cover up outdoors. Sunscreen is essential year-round, but on the beach in summer, it's important to supplement with a long-sleeved shirt and wide-brimmed hat. You don't need to spend a lot of money on high-tech fabrics; Dr. Schwartz recommends lightweight nylon shirts that you can wear right in the water. He also recommends applying topical antioxidants in tandem with sunscreen. As with everything, the main thing is to find products you like and will use daily. Another threat is from tanning beds, long suspected but now definitively proven to cause melanoma.

## Cosmetic Options & More

Dorset Street Dermatology recently expanded to a second building, in part because of rapid growth on the cosmetic side of the practice. Dr. Schwartz is the only Vermont physician certified to use Sculptra, known in Europe as the liquid facelift. He also offers Radiesse, a volume filler that targets specific areas of the face and neck. Both stimulate collagen growth gradually and last for years. ▶



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### Five Tips for Healthy Vermont Winter Skin

- 1** Use a cool air humidifier. They're easy to clean so there's no risk of mold, as with warm air humidifiers. A whole-house system is best, but the bedroom and near your desk at work are important locations if you're using a smaller humidifier.
- 2** Choose a synthetic detergent body soap. Dr. Schwartz recommends unscented Dove because it's mild. Limit cleaning to areas that really need it: underarms, groin; the rest of your body will get clean just by having water wash over it.
- 3** With the right soap, daily showers or baths are fine—all that water can be hydrating. As soon as you're out of the tub, pat skin dry and apply whatever kind of moisturizer has a texture and scent that appeal to you.
- 4** Use sunscreen, even when it's cloudy! Snow acts like a million tiny mirrors, reflecting the sun back at your skin, so even a brimmed hat won't provide enough protection.
- 5** Go south (not west) for a break if you can. The humid air in Florida, for example, can do wonders for dry Vermont skin.

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And Botox continues to grow in popularity. It took Dr. Schwartz a while to come around on Botox—he hadn't taken the Hippocratic Oath to then inject a toxin, he says. But he changed his mind after reading psychological studies showing that Botox treatments can have a positive effect on depression and self-esteem. Indeed, its use keeps increasing around the country—even during the current economic recession—because it makes people feel good.

The practice also offers a variety of skin care products, medical spa services, and general and cosmetic dermatology. Dr. Schwartz is assisted in his work by a large staff that includes Phoebe Pelkey, a physician's assistant specializing in medical dermatology; nurse-practitioner Katherine Wright; and medical aesthetician Chelsea Carmichael.

Dr. Schwartz understands personally the need to limit sun exposure. Like so many, he and his wife and two sons—now grown—first came to the area to ski and



Dr. Schwartz enjoying his new office.

ended up buying property on the shores of Lake Champlain. These days, in his limited free time, Dr. Schwartz is often found out on the water windsurfing and in the mountains skiing—two locations that can lead to plenty of sun damage. In fact, Dr. Schwartz has undergone treatment with products he prescribes to his patients. His own before-and-after photographs are on display in his waiting room.

Dr. Schwartz and his wife also visit Florida frequently, where you can't miss him on the beach. He's the one wearing the broad-brimmed hat and long sleeves, the man with the healthy, untanned skin.



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