

OUTDOORS | ETC.

RUNNING NOTEBOOK

Benefit at night aims to shed light on melanoma

As a two-time survivor of melanoma, Jennifer Briscoe stays indoors when she works out, doing Pilates, taking a spin class or exercising at a ballet barre.



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When she does venture to Memorial Park for Sunday morning walks with her husband and two standard poodles, she always wears sunscreen and a big, floppy hat.

But Briscoe won't have to worry about ultraviolet radiation at the AIM for a Cure Melanoma Walk and Fun Run 5K on Sept. 22. For the first time in its five

years, the event will start at night to emphasize the importance of sun safety. Proceeds benefit melanoma research at MD Anderson Cancer Center, and the post-race party will include free skin-cancer screenings.

"We'd like participants to walk away with a greater appreciation for simple steps that make a difference, such as staying out of the sun at peak hours," said Dr. Jeffrey E. Lee, chair of the center's Department of Surgical Oncology.

Skin cancer is the most common cancer, reports the American Cancer Society. While melanoma accounts for less than 5 percent of skin-cancer

AIM for a Cure

When: 7:30 p.m. Sept. 22,

Where: MD Anderson Cancer Center Mays Clinic, 1155 Pressler St.

Registration: Free, but participants are encouraged to raise \$50 each; 713-745-1804 or aimatmelanoma.org

cases, it causes the most skin-cancer deaths, nearly 9,200 annually. It also strikes at any age and is one of the more common cancers in young adults.

Excessive UV light exposure, from the sun or tanning beds, is one risk factor for melanoma, says the Mayo Clinic. So is a family history of the disease.

Though her father had died of skin cancer and she had spent much of her childhood outdoors — her father had a boat — Briscoe was surprised 10 years ago when, at age 36, she learned a mole on her right outer thigh was melanoma.

"I had seen that mole on my leg for five to 10 years," the native Houstonian said.

Surgery removed the cancer, which was confined to her skin's surface. Briscoe admits she didn't realize at the time how fortunate she was.

"I didn't do a lot of research; that mole had been there for years. I thought it was a slow-growing thing."

In 2008, Briscoe developed basal cell carcinoma, a nonmelanoma skin cancer, and had more surgeries. But, she said, her wake-up call didn't come until this past November, when she noticed a mole on her back that she hadn't seen four months earlier.

"It was teeny, tiny compared to the mole on my leg," she said. It was melanoma again, and, unlike before, it had penetrated through her skin. After more surgery and an anxious few weeks, Briscoe learned the cancer hadn't spread to her lymph nodes.

Now Briscoe, who owns a recruiting firm, is spreading the word. She

is among the top fundraisers for the fun run and one of about 100 melanoma survivors expected to participate. Her message?

"I'd like people to know how easy it is to get and how fast it is to spread and how there is no cure," she said. She also points out melanoma is easy to catch early, when it's highly treatable, because people can examine their skin.

And, Briscoe adds, it's not hard to reduce a major risk factor — UV exposure.

"I cover up, even in the winter. You still get sun, even when it's cloudy. It doesn't make a difference," she said.

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