

# Skin Deep

BY KATHY ANDREWS & ANDRÉ VALENTINE

**SKIN CANCER MAY BE ONE OF THE BIGGEST THREATS TO CYCLISTS. IT'S HARD TO DETECT, DIFFICULT TO PROTECT AGAINST, AND SPREADS FAST. HERE'S HOW TO SAVE YOUR SKIN... AND YOURSELF!**

My husband, Hugh Andrews, was an avid rider for years. He also windsurfed, ran marathons, paddled more than one Dusi, and ridden many Sani's. In short, he spent a lot of time being active outdoors.

Four years ago, after a ride in the Umkomaas Valley, he noticed that both sides of his groin were a little swollen. Because it wasn't too painful, he didn't get it seen to straight away. But soon after the ride he went to our GP, who sent him straight for a biopsy. A few days later we received the devastating news: he had melanoma cancer.

According to dermatologist Dr Suretha Kannenberg, melanomas are "weight-for-weight, the most dangerous cancer known to man". They are pigment-producing cells known as melanocytes, which can be found on other parts of the body as well. "We also find melanocytes in the eye, and in the membranes around the brain and spinal cord."

Just prior to the diagnosis, he had ridden his best Sani ever and hadn't felt sick, except for some fatigue; but with today's pace of life we put it down to stress from work, and ignored it.

Melanoma cancer originates from too much sun exposure. Before the doctor could prescribe treatment he had to find the primary lesion. Turns out it was a mole on my husband's lower back – a mole that had been rubbed off by his backpack over time. Because it came off, leaving just a small mark, we thought nothing of it, and didn't even get it checked out.

Despite wearing a cycling top, Hugh still got a melanoma; the reason for this, says Dr Kannenberg, is that our cycling kit may not offer as much UV protection as we think. "Tight-fitting cycling clothing that does not specifically state that it blocks UV will not offer the protection the cyclist requires," says Kannenberg. "The more the fabric is stretched, the less protection you get." If you don't have UV-specific kit, she suggests you wear a double layer of clothing to avoid unnecessary UV exposure.

Since then, the journey has been relentless. He's had selected glands removed from both legs, suffered from post-surgery infections which prolonged his recovery, and has had to give up his job. Eight months



into treatment, he developed secondary cancers to the brain, in the form of tumours. They were inoperable, and one was at the base of the skull, putting pressure on his spinal cord. This resulted in paralysis of the right side of his body. New treatments were introduced, along with radiotherapy to shrink the tumours. Since then he has had other treatment regimes, and three more sessions of radiotherapy. We are still fighting the disease.

As a family fighting cancer, we have learnt so much. Like really appreciating the simple things in life that make us happy, and spending time making the most of each day, with the ones we love. My husband has also had to accept that he's no longer able to participate in any of the things he loves, and has to depend on others; which is not easy for him. But he faces each challenge bravely, and has found other ways to occupy his time when he feels well enough.

Our boys have both been amazing with their father. They have shown us both so much love and support, and we have drawn together even closer as a family.

"We don't usually develop new moles after the age of 45; so if you should notice a new mole, it's very important to have it checked by a healthcare professional," says Kannenberg. She also earmarks genetics as a key factor: "If there is family history of melanoma, especially from a first-degree relative, you should be on high alert and protect yourself."

I also believe the sport of MTB instils certain qualities in you, even if they are not inherent in your nature... that *vasbyt*, perseverance and resilience, as you strive to conquer a climb or overcome the obstacles en route, and finally reach the end of a race. I know that's what it's done for me, and I'm very grateful to my husband for having shared his passion with us.

Sunscreen is lauded as the number-one way to protect against UV rays. But Dr Maureen Allem, founder of the Skin, Body and Health Renewal spas, says that extra protection can be found in oral supplementation. This is especially true for instances in which clothing doesn't offer protection – as well as for protecting areas that have no clothing cover at all. "Internal supplementation is very important," says Allem. "Cycling