



Informational Article

Topic: Sun Safety

Sun Safety 101

Using sunscreen every day along with some other simple habits will help you protect your skin and enjoy your time in the sun.

There are many benefits to spending time in the sun. Just 10 to 30 minutes of sunlight each day can boost vitamin D, improve your mood, help you sleep better, and contribute to your overall well-being in many other ways. You can receive the benefits of sunlight safely by practicing sun safety habits.

This article explores the effects that sunlight can have on the skin and ways to protect against damage from the sun.

In this article

- Understanding UV rays
- Selecting and using sunscreen
- Taking cover to boost protection
- Individual differences
- When to get medical advice
- Key takeaways
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Understanding UV rays

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation (rays) comes from the sun and from artificial sources like tanning beds. There are two types that can damage unprotected skin.

- Ultraviolet A (UVA) goes deep into the skin. Long-term exposure to UVA can cause wrinkles, dark spots, and skin aging. To remember this, think “A = aging.”
- Ultraviolet B (UVB) stays on top of the skin. Short-term exposure to UVB can cause sunburn. Think “B = burning.”

UV exposure adds up over time, so you may not see skin damage right away. The more unprotected time spent in the sun, the more damage will build up. This can lead to serious health issues, including skin cancer and eye problems. That’s why it’s so important to lower your risk by using sun safety strategies every day.

Selecting and using sunscreen

The active ingredients in sunscreen prevent UV rays from damaging your skin. When applied correctly, sunscreen can help reduce your risk of developing skin cancer and help prevent premature aging. Adults and children over the age of six months should use sunscreen every day.

Types

There are two types of sunscreens that work in different ways:

- Physical (mineral) sunscreens that include titanium dioxide and zinc oxide stop UV rays before they can get into your skin. These sunscreens are heavy, thick, and white. They stay on top of the skin.
- Chemical sunscreens absorb UV rays before they can damage skin. These sunscreens are light and fluid. They go into the skin.

Physical sunscreens are less likely to cause skin irritation, but both types are safe and effective when used as directed.

Sun Protection Factor

The Sun Protection Factor (SPF) number on a sunscreen indicates how well sunscreen protects your skin from UVB rays. The higher the number, the better the protection.

When you stay inside most of the day with short times in the sun, use with an SPF of 30 or higher. When you spend a lot of time outdoors, use sunscreen with an SPF of 50 or higher.

What to look for in a sunscreen

- Broad-spectrum sunscreen protects against both UVA and UVB rays.
- SPF 30 is perfect for occasional sun exposure during the day.
- SPF 50 is the minimum protection for extended time outdoors.
- Water resistant is effective in the water for 40 minutes.
- Very water resistant is effective in the water for 80 minutes.

Cosmetic products with SPF protect against UVB rays only. For more coverage, apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with the right SPF for your activity *before* using these products.

How to apply sunscreen

Finding the right sunscreen is only half the work. To get its maximum benefit, it is important to apply and reapply sunscreen correctly.

- Apply 15-30 minutes before going outside for the day.
- The amount of sunscreen needed will vary depending on body type and size. Generally, adults should apply at least one ounce (a full shot-glass) to cover from head to toe. For children, be sure to use enough for full body coverage.

- Be sure to include the tops of the ears, the back of the neck, the scalp (part line), the tops of the feet, and behind the knees.
- For lip coverage, use an SPF lip balm.
- When using spray sunscreen: shake well, hold the can close to the skin, apply generously and evenly, and rub it into the skin.
- When using stick sunscreen: use four passes back and forth on each area you want to protect and rub it into the skin for an even layer of coverage.
- Reapply every two hours and immediately after swimming or excessive sweating.

Taking cover to boost protection

As important as sunscreen is, it's only part of a sun safety plan. There are more ways to reduce the risks of exposure to UVA and UVB rays.

- Stay in the shade as much as possible under an umbrella, tree, or other shelter. This is especially important during peak sun hours when the sun's rays are the strongest.
- Wear clothes that cover, like long-sleeved shirts and long pants or skirts. If this isn't practical, try to wear a T-shirt or beach cover-up. Clothes made from tightly woven fabric provide the best protection.
- Wear a hat with a full brim that shades your face, your ears, and the back of your neck. A tightly woven fabric like canvas works best.
- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes. While shielding the skin around them, you also reduce the risk of cataracts. Wrap around styles are best.

Individual differences

There are more factors to consider for sun protection in children, older adults, and people with darker skin tones.

Children

- Sunscreen is not advised for children younger than 6 months. That makes it important to keep them out of direct sunlight.
- For children older than 6 months, mineral sunscreen is often recommended for sensitive skin.

Older Adults

- Skin becomes thinner with age, which can make it more prone to sunburn.
- Some medications may increase sun sensitivity.

People With Darker Skin Tones

- Melanin offers some natural protection, but UV damage can still occur.
- Sunscreen helps prevent hyperpigmentation and long-term skin changes.

When to get medical advice

Exposure to extreme heat and overexposure to UV rays can lead to serious medical conditions. Get prompt medical attention when needed.

Heat-related illnesses

- Heat stress and heat exhaustion require immediate emergency care.

Severe sunburn

Get medical attention if you have:

- A first-degree burn all over your body
- A large area of blistered skin
- Symptoms of sickness, such as fever, chills or feeling faint

New or changing moles

- One way that new moles can form is from UV exposure.
- Check moles often.
- Get medical attention for new moles, and any moles that itch, bleed, or change shape, size, or color.

Key takeaways

Sunlight contains two kinds of ultraviolet (UV) rays that affect your skin: UVA rays (aging), and UVB rays (burn). A sun safety plan helps to limit exposure to UV rays and reduce the risk of premature aging, sunburn, skin cancer, and eye damage.

Applying sunscreen correctly every day is an important part of sun safety. Other ways to increase sun protection include seeking shade, wearing clothes that cover, and adding hats and sunglasses. Different measures may need to be taken for children, older adults, and people with darker skin tones.

Whenever you have any concerns about sun exposure or are experiencing symptoms of sun-related illness, you should get medical attention promptly.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What kind of sunscreen is best?

Both physical (mineral) and chemical sunscreens are safe and effective when used as directed. Use the right SPF for the day's activity. When you stay inside most of the day with short times in the sun, use SPF of 30 or higher. When you spend a lot of time outdoors, use SPF of 50 or higher.

What is the right way to apply sunscreen?

- Apply sunscreen 15-30 minutes before going outside for the day.
- The amount of sunscreen needed will vary depending on body type and size. Generally, adults should apply at least one ounce (a full shot-glass) to cover from head to toe. For children, be sure to use enough for full body coverage.

- Be sure to include the tops of the ears, the back of the neck, the scalp (the part line), the tops of the feet, and behind the knees.
- For lip coverage, apply lip balm with SPF.
- When using stick or spray sunscreen, be sure to rub it into the skin for the best coverage.

Will sunscreen protect me all day?

One application of sunscreen does not protect the skin for a full day. Reapply every two hours and immediately after swimming or excessive sweating.

Do I have to cover up if I'm already wearing sunscreen?

While an important part of sun safety, sunscreen alone is not enough. The best protection also includes shade, clothes that cover, sunglasses, and hats. All of it works together to lower the risk of premature aging and developing serious medical issues like skin cancer and eye problems.

Sources

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Summary



Sun Safety 101

Keep yourself and those you care for sun-safe this summer, and all year long.

Sun Safety Matters

Sunlight contains two kinds of ultraviolet (UV) rays that affect your skin: UVA rays (think aging), and UVB rays (think sunburn). Both can pass through clouds and windows, so your skin is **always** exposed—winter, spring, summer, and fall.

Protecting yourself is important to reduce the risk of premature aging, sunburn, skin cancer, and eye damage from sun exposure.

Take Cover Every Day

-  Sunscreen
-  UV blocking sunglasses
-  Protective clothing
-  Brimmed hat
-  Shade

Sunscreen Shopping Checklist

- ✓ SPF 30 or higher
- ✓ Broad Spectrum (UVA+UVB protection)
- ✓ Water resistant for swimming / sweating
- ✓ *Mineral* for sensitive skin or kids 6m+
- ✓ *Chemical* for lightweight feel

How to Apply Sunscreen

- 15 minutes before going outside
- Use one ounce (full shot-glass)
- Don't miss ears, neck, scalp, feet
- Reapply every two hours
- Use SPF lip balm

Extra Care



- Medication interactions can increase sun sensitivity
- In older adults, thinner skin burns more easily
- Keep infants under 6m out of direct sunlight
- Hyperpigmentation can worsen with sun exposure

Extra Concern



Get medical advice for:

- New or changing moles
- Severe sunburn with blisters
- Signs of heat exhaustion

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