

SUN SAFETY

Save Your Skin!

Sun safety is never out of season. Summer's arrival means it's time for picnics, trips to the pool and beach—and a spike in the number of sunburns. But winter skiers and fall hikers need to be as wary of the sun's rays as swimmers do. People who work outdoors need to take precautions as well.

The need for sun safety has become clear over the past 30 years, with studies showing that exposure to the sun can cause skin cancer. Harmful rays from the sun—and from sunlamps and tanning beds—may also cause eye problems, weaken your immune system, and give you unsightly skin spots, wrinkles, or “leathery” skin.

Sun damage to the body is caused by invisible ultraviolet (UV) radiation. People recognize sunburn as a type of skin damage caused by the sun. Tanning is also a sign of the skin reacting to potentially damaging UV radiation by producing additional pigmentation that provides it with some—but often not enough—protection against sunburn.

No matter what our skin color, we're all potentially susceptible to sunburn and the other detrimental effects of exposure to UV radiation. Although we all need to take precautions to protect our skin, people who



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Reduce time in the sun, especially from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the sun's rays are strongest.

need to be especially careful in the sun are those who have

- pale skin
- blond, red, or light brown hair
- been treated for skin cancer
- a family member who's had skin cancer

If you take medicines, ask your health care professional about extra sun-care precautions, because some medications may increase sensitivity to the sun.

Cosmetics that contain alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs) also may increase sun sensitivity and susceptibility to sunburn. To learn more about this, see the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's fact sheet on AHAs at <http://www.fda.gov/Cosmetics/ProductandIngredientSafety/SelectedCosmeticIngredients/UCM107940>.

Reduce Time in the Sun

It is important to limit sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun's rays are strongest. Even on an overcast day, up to 80 percent of the sun's UV rays can get through the clouds. Stay in the shade as much as possible throughout the day.

Dress with Care

Wear clothes that protect your body. Cover as much of your body as possible if you plan to be outside on a sunny day. Wear a wide-brimmed hat, long sleeves, and long pants. Sun-protective clothing is now available. However, FDA does not regulate such products unless the manufacturer intends to make a medical claim. Consider using an umbrella for shade.

Be Serious about Sunscreen

Check product labels to make sure you get

- a "sun protection factor" (SPF) of 15 or more. SPF represents the degree to which a sunscreen can protect the skin from sunburn. The higher the number, the better the protection
- "broad spectrum" protection—sunscreen that protects against all types of skin damage caused by sunlight
- water resistance—sunscreen that stays on your skin longer, even if it gets wet. "Water-resistant" does not mean "waterproof." Water-resistant sunscreens need to be reapplied as instructed on the label

Tips for Applying Sunscreen

- Apply the recommended amount evenly to all uncovered skin, especially your lips, nose, ears, neck, hands, and feet.
- Apply sunscreen 15 minutes before going out in the sun.
- If you don't have much hair, apply sunscreen to the top of your head, or wear a hat.
- Reapply at least every two hours.
- Give babies and children extra care in the sun. Ask a health care professional before applying sunscreen to children under 6 months old.
- Apply sunscreen to children older than 6 months every time they go out.
- Be aware that some tanning products on the market do not contain sunscreen. FDA requires these products to carry a warning statement.

Protect the Eyes

Sunlight reflecting off snow, sand, or water further increases exposure to UV radiation, increasing your risk of developing eye problems such as cataracts.

Long hours on the beach or in the snow without adequate eye protection also can result in a short-term condition known as photokeratitis,

or reversible sunburn of the cornea. This painful condition that is also known as "snow blindness" can cause temporary loss of vision.

Here are other tips for eye-related sun safety.

- When buying sunglasses, look for a label that specifically offers 99 to 100 percent UV protection. This assures that the glasses block both forms of UV radiation.
- Eyewear should be labeled "sunglasses." Be wary of dark or tinted eyewear sold as fashion accessories that may provide little or no protection from UV or visible light.
- Don't assume that you get more UV protection with pricier sunglasses from glasses with a darker tint.
- Be sure that your sunglasses don't distort colors and affect the recognition of traffic signals.
- Ask an eye care professional to test your sunglasses if you're not sure of their level of UV protection.
- People who wear contact lenses that offer UV protection should still wear sunglasses.
- Consider that light can still enter from the sides of sunglasses. Those that wrap all the way around the temples can help.
- Children should wear real sunglasses (not toy sunglasses) that indicate the UV protection level. Polycarbonate lenses are the most shatter-resistant.

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