

Sun Safety



Overview

The sun has always been a source of warmth, happiness, and a golden tan. However, it's essential to understand the dangers of the sun and the price your skin pays for unprotected exposure. While there are still plenty of ways to have fun in the sun, it's important to protect yourself from potential hazards.

What are the Dangers of the Sun?

Thirty years ago, the medical community started to take note of the damages associated with sun exposure. While it's an excellent source of Vitamin D and has also been shown to reduce depression and improve the mood of many, the sun also gives off ultraviolet radiation. This radiation reaches down to earth and its inhabitants via long and short wavelengths known as UVA and UVB. Both types of radiation are harmful after prolonged exposure with UVA causing

premature aging of the skin and UVB causing burning of the skin.

Here are some of the conditions that exposure can cause:

- **UV rays can damage the eyes**

UV light can be damaging to any and all parts of your eyes including your eyelid skin. Prolonged and chronic exposure can lead to corneal damage, cataracts, and even macular degeneration. These conditions ultimately affect our eyes' ability to see.

- **UV rays can damage the skin**

Prolonged sun exposure can lead to sunburns, freckling, leathery texture, premature aging, precancers, and even skin cancer.

- **UV rays can affect our immune system**

UV rays have been shown to suppress our immune system responses. While this can at times be useful in treating immune system-driven conditions like vitiligo and psoriasis, it can be harmful when it comes to our body's ability to fight off skin cancer and infections.

- **UV rays can worsen certain skin conditions**

UV rays can at times elicit skin rashes such as in the case of solar urticaria and polymorphous light eruption. UV radiation can also exacerbate or flare certain conditions such as lupus.

How to Protect Yourself From the Sun

Protection from UV radiation is important all year round, even on cloudy or cold days. UV radiation can even reflect off water, sand, and snow. Let's look at some of the best and easiest ways to enjoy your time in the sun safely and comfortably.

- **Use Sunscreen**

Sunscreen use is critical to protecting your skin from UV radiation. Wearing the right sunscreen will allow you to maximize your time in the sun while being protected from its harmful rays. Dermatologists recommend picking a broad spectrum sunscreen (one which blocks both UVA and UVB rays) with an SPF of 30 or higher. Apply the sunscreen liberally and thoroughly, ensuring that all sun exposed skin has been covered. As a general rule, a shot glass full of sunscreen is needed to cover an adult's body. Apply the sunscreen 15 minutes before heading outdoors, and don't forget to reapply a minimum of once every 2 hours. Beware that your sunscreen may wash away if you are swimming or sweating. Picking a water resistant sunscreen and frequently reapplying will help you stay protected in the sun even when you are participating in water activities or exercising.

- **Cover Up As Much As Possible**

In general, dermatologists recommend covering up as much as possible when spending time outdoors. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when possible. While all clothing provides some degree of UV protection, not all fabrics and clothing offer the same protection. As a rule of thumb, darker colors and denser fabric with tighter weaves offer more protection from the sun's harmful rays. Dry clothing also offers better protection than wet clothing. Certain companies which specialize in sun protective clothing lines even include a UPF number (ultraviolet protection factor) on their label.

- **Wear A Wide-Brimmed Hat**

Wearing a wide-brimmed hat can provide protection to your scalp, ears, face, and even your neck.

- **Wear Sunglasses**

As mentioned above, UV rays can be damaging to your eyes as well as your eyelid skin. Dermatologists recommend wearing sunglasses with UV protection to shield your eyes and delicate eyelid skin from the dangerous UV rays.

- **Don't Forget Your Feet**

The tops of your feet can also be damaged from unprotected sun exposure. Remember to wear shoes that cover your feet when possible. If wearing sandals or flip-flops or going barefoot, don't forget to apply sunscreen to the tops of your feet!

- **Seek Shade**

Aside from sunscreen use and wearing sun protective apparel, seeking shade under an umbrella, tent, or tree is another easy way to reduce the amount of UV radiation reaching your skin.

- **Limit Your Sun Time**

You should try to limit your time in the sun. Dermatologists recommend avoiding peak hours between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are at their strongest.

- **Inspect Your Skin**

Dermatologists recommend routinely checking your skin and scheduling an appointment to evaluate any new, unusual, changing, or symptomatic growths.

As long as you remember these protective measures, you can enjoy your time in the sun. However, it's essential to reach out to your dermatologist right away if you notice any changes in your skin.