

## Sun and Health

Too much sunlight is harmful and can damage the skin. There are two main types of damaging ultraviolet sunlight, UVA and UVB. UVA has an effect of ageing the skin and causing wrinkles and other damage to deeper layers of skin. UVB causes sun tanning but also burning. It can also cause other damage to the skin. In some people, too much UVB may cause skin cancer. All people are at risk if exposed to too much sun. People with fair skin, freckles, red or ginger hair are most at risk. In general, the darker the skin, the less risk of developing skin cancer.

### Preventing sun damage

- Stay out of the sun as much as possible. In particular, do not sunbathe between 10am and 2pm when the sun's rays are strongest.
- When out, wear wide brimmed hats to protect the face and neck. These are the areas most commonly affected by skin cancers due to too much sunlight.
- Cover up the body as much as possible. Wear long sleeve tops and baggy shorts.
- Children's skin is more sensitive than adults. They should keep their clothes on whilst playing in the sun. All exposed areas of the body should have sunscreen applied. Wide brimmed hats with a neck protector are recommended.
- Sunscreens should be applied to all exposed areas of skin. Renew it regularly. Sunscreens are labeled with a sun protection factor (SPF). A factor of 15 or more is recommended for maximum protection. Most work by absorbing ultraviolet rays but some reflect the rays. Ones that protect against both UVA and UVB are the best. Sunscreens should be used to help protect against sunlight, not as a substitute for avoiding exposure. If swimming use a waterproof sunscreen and renew it after coming out of the water.
- Some sun tanning lotions do not contain sunscreen and will provide no protection.
- Beware of reflected light. On sunny days, even in the shade, a hot sun can burn if reflected from sand etc. Sunlight can also come through thin clouds and thin clothes.
- The sun's rays are more powerful at higher altitudes. Beware of this. It may be cooler but you will need more protection.
- Wear sunglasses as exposure to prolonged sunlight can also damage the eyes.
- Remember - SLIP, SLAP, SLOP. Slip on some clothes. Slap on a hat. Slop on sunscreen.

### Sunburn and sunstroke

Short-term overexposure to sun can cause burning. The skin becomes red, hot and painful. After a few days the burnt skin may peel. A cool shower or bath will help. Soothing creams such as calamine lotion will help. Tylenol will help with pain. A mild steroid cream may be advised by a pharmacist or doctor to 'dampen down' the inflamed skin if severe. If vomiting, fever and headaches occur this may be due to sunstroke. Make sure you drink plenty of fluids and take some tylenol. Consult your doctor if it does not quickly settle.

### Sun damage

Repeated exposure to too much sun over a number of years can cause damage to skin. Apart from early ageing and wrinkling, sun damaged skin can include the following. Brown spots, roughened `crusty` spots and skin cancers. It is not just people who sunbathe who are at risk. Outdoor workers who do not cover their skin are more prone to these problems. If you notice any area of skin that looks unusual, or any lumps or moles that change shape, become irregular in shape, bleed, change color or become ulcerated (sore), then report this to your doctor.