

# Summer Sun Safety

by

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“Honey, put on your sunscreen.” As a dermatologist, I constantly find myself reminding others to protect their skin from the harmful effects of the sun. The ultraviolet rays in sunlight that are responsible for causing sun damage, such as skin cancer and premature aging of the skin, are invisible and their exposure is painless. And, during the summer while you are outside playing, it is easy to forget to protect your skin. But the fact is, even one-half hour of sun exposure will cause permanent damage to the skin.



Unlike a sports injury that usually causes sudden pain to let you know something is wrong and needs to be fixed, sun damage occurs gradually and with only the symptoms of a tan, freckles or a sunburn. The hours spent outside add up and the cumulative sun damage that occurs during childhood will result in pre-skin cancers and skin cancers that will develop years later.

## Steps to protect your skin:

- Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30, or greater. SPF is a rating that tells you how long you can stay in the sun without getting burned wearing that particular sunscreen as compared to how long you can stay in the sun before you burn *without* wearing that sunscreen. A higher SPF does not indicate superior sun protection. In fact, an SPF 2 factor protects your skin just as effectively as an SPF 30. However, an SPF 2 will need to be applied more frequently because it is only doubling the amount of time you can stay in the sun before burning.
- Apply a nickel- to a quarter-sized amount of sunscreen to cover your face, the same amount for the neck and, if exposed, the same amount for the chest. You must use the correct amount of sunscreen to get the SPF protection shown on the label.
- Reapply your sunscreen every two hours if you are sweating or swimming. If the sunscreen is labeled "very water resistant," you get about 80 minutes of protection while perspiring or swimming. If the label states "water-resistant," you only get about 40 minutes of protection. In addition to your sunscreen washing off, the lotions lose their effectiveness the longer you are in the sun. Ingredients in sunscreen breakdown in the presence of sunlight.
- Apply sunscreen 20 minutes prior to sun exposure to ensure the sunscreen has time to attach to the skin and provide a protective layer.
- Wear sun-protective clothing instead of sunscreen to protect your skin. This can be more cost-effective and minimizes the exposure to chemicals that are absorbed by the body when applied to the skin. Look for material with an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) rating. A shirt with a UPF of 50, for example, allows just 1/50th of the sun's ultra violet (UV) radiation to reach the skin. This means the fabric will reduce your skin's UV radiation exposure significantly because only two percent of the UV rays will get through. A white T-shirt only provides a UPF of seven.

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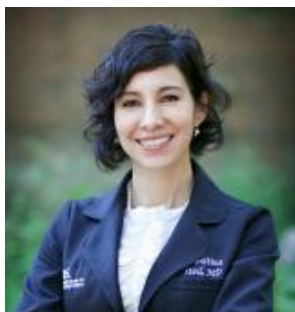
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- Wear a hat with at least a three-inch brim. Baseball caps only cover the scalp and the central forehead. Unfortunately, the rest of the face is left unprotected.
- Talk to your physician or dermatologist about taking Heliocare<sup>®</sup>, an oral antioxidant supplement that helps skin resist ultraviolet damage.

If you forget to apply your sunscreen and are unfortunate enough to get a sunburn you have changed your skin forever. Not only will you suffer the immediate effects of pain and blisters, five sunburns over your lifetime doubles your risk for melanoma, and one blistering sunburn has the same effect. So, prevention is the key.

### **Treating a sunburn**

- If you notice your skin turning pink during sun exposure, get out of the sun because the damage that has occurred already is worse than it appears. The skin will continue to redden over the next four to six hours.
- Take a cool shower, apply a moisturizing cream and take ibuprofen for the next 48 hours. Ibuprofen will help reduce swelling, pain and redness. You may use an over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream for one to two days to help relieve discomfort.
- Remain hydrated. Sunburned skin draws fluid away from the rest of the body.
- Do not pick or peel the healing skin. Apply fragrance-free moisturizers and avoid further sun exposure.
- Blistering sunburns that cover greater than 20 percent of the bodies surface area (a person's whole back) require medical attention and anyone with a sunburn that is suffering from fever and chills also should seek medical attention.



Dr. Christina Steil is an American Academy of Dermatology board certified dermatologist who has devoted many years to studying diseases of the skin.

She graduated magna cum laude with a biochemistry degree from Washington University, St. Louis, and earned her medical degree for the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine. Dr. Steil completed her dermatology residency at Cook County Hospital in Chicago where she trained in the clinical and surgical treatment of skin diseases and served as chief resident. She also had a medical internship at Loyola University Medical Center. After completing her medical training, Dr. Steil spent a year researching psoriasis, skin cancer cells and their relationship to the cutaneous immune system.

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