

Protect Yourself from the Sun

Did you know that skin cancer rates are on the rise in the U.S., where it is the most common type of cancer?¹ It's no wonder. Just in the past year alone, one-third of the adult population has been sunburned at least once. And that lobster-red look is a clear sign of exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays—a known cause of skin cancer, which can impact any age, gender, or race.^{1,2}

Risks of tanning. But you're not off the hook if you stop at tanning. That's your body's response to sun injury.¹ When you tan—either outdoors or indoors—you increase your risk of melanoma—the deadliest form of skin cancer. You also increase your risk of:

- Premature skin aging—wrinkles and age spots
- Damaged skin texture
- Potentially blinding eye diseases¹

Here's the silver lining in this gloomy cloud: Avoiding the sun's UV rays is one of the best ways to prevent skin cancer.¹

General guidelines. You probably know the drill, but it bears repeating:

1. Seek shade and stay out of the sun, if you can, when UV rays are strongest—from 10 am to 4 pm.
2. Be extra careful at higher altitudes where skin burns faster.
3. Limit exposure to water, sand, snow, and concrete—surfaces that reflect light.
4. Use sun protection even on cloudy days, when certain types of UV rays can be stronger.
5. Rely on diet and supplements to get your vitamin D, not the sun.^{2,3}

Sunscreen. Don't use a product that combines sunscreen and insect repellent. Reapplying it will expose you to too much of the repellent's ingredients. Also, avoid spray tans and bronzers—they won't protect your skin from UV rays.⁴

Do choose sunscreens that:

- Block both UVA and UVB rays.
- Are labeled with sun protection factor (SPF) 30 or higher.

- Are water resistant—they're more protective when you sweat.
- Are products you will use consistently. Generally, creams are best for dry skin and the face, gels work well for hairy areas, and sticks are easier to apply near eyes. Mineral-based sunscreens—such as zinc oxide or titanium dioxide—work well if you have sensitive skin.^{2,3}

Wear sunscreen every day, even if you plan to be outside a short time. For best results, apply it generously 15 to 30 minutes before you go outside to all exposed areas—don't forget your feet and ears. (A lip balm works best for your lips.) Always reapply after swimming or sweating and about every two hours or as often as the package suggests.^{2,3}

Sun-protective clothing. In addition to sunscreen, wear clothing that can better protect you such as:

- A hat with a wide brim. This works better than a baseball cap or visor for shielding your whole face from the sun.
- Sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB rays.
- Long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Loose-fitting, unbleached, tightly woven fabrics.
- Special clothing that absorbs UV rays.³

Don't forget to protect those parts of your body that may be in constant sunlight--- your nose, forehead, and eyes. Questions about sun-protection products or other ways to protect your family in the sun? Remember, I'm right here—your ready resource.

Nothing herein constitutes medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, or is a substitute for professional advice. You should always seek the advice of your physician or other medical professional if you have questions or concerns about a medical condition.

Sources:

1. CDC: "The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Skin Cancer." Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/pdf/consumer-booklet.pdf> Accessed 6-6-17.

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<https://www.aad.org/media/stats/prevention-and-care/sunscreen-faqs>
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3. MedlinePlus: "Sun Protection." Available at:
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