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Healthy Insights

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Fun in the Sun: Tips for Proper Sun Protection

As you plan your outdoor activities this summer, remember to always protect yourself and your family from the dangers of too much sun.

What are the risks of UV exposure?

The sun produces ultraviolet radiation, also known as UV rays. Ultraviolet radiation can have serious harmful effects on your skin and eyes. Sunburn is a symptom of short term overexposure. Long term effects include:

- Skin cancer, including melanoma. Skin cancer is mainly caused by UV radiation, and is the most common type of cancer in the United States.
- Eye problems, including cataracts and cornea inflammation, which can lead to serious vision damage, and sometimes blindness.
- Increased and faster skin aging, including liver spots, leathery skin, and deepened wrinkles.



Anyone can get skin cancer. But some people are at higher risk of UV damage. You should pay extra attention to sun protection if you

- are over the age of 50;
- have light colored skin or eyes;
- have numerous and/or irregular skin moles;
- spend extended periods in the sun, or are already sunburnt;
- are currently on antibiotic medication.

Six simple steps everyone should take to prevent and reduce UV damage.

1. Cover up: Wear a long-sleeved shirt and pants or a long skirt for added protection when possible. If that's not practical, try wearing a t-shirt or a beach cover up.
2. Wear a hat with a brim of at least three inches and UV blocking sunglasses to protect your eyes and face.
3. Use sunscreen: No matter what time of the year it is, always use sunscreen with at least an 15 SPF. Reapply sunscreen every two hours, and after swimming or sweating.

What is SPF? SPF or “sun protection factor,” is a measure of a sunscreen’s ability to protect skin damage from UV rays.



4. Try to stay in the shade, especially during midday hours. Do the ‘shadow’ test: You can gauge when UV rays are at their most intense by checking your shadow. If your shadow is shorter than your body, it means that the sun’s rays are the strongest. Usually, this lasts from 10 AM to 4 PM. Try to stay in the shade during this time period. And remember, sun damage can occur on cloudy and overcast days as well!
5. Be extra careful to protect yourself around surfaces—like sand, water and concrete—that reflect the sun’s rays.
6. Finally, you should check your skin regularly for early signs of skin cancer: Self-examinations are extremely helpful, as skin cancer detected early is almost always curable. Every month, check your skin for:
 - Wax-like nodules
 - Sharply outlined patches
 - Sores that don’t heal
 - Small mole-like growths.

If you see anything that concerns you, check with your doctor.



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More information

American Cancer Society

<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/skin-cancer/prevention-and-early-detection/what-is-uv-radiation.html>

American Academy of Dermatology

www.aad.org

National Cancer Institute

www.cancer.gov

Skin Cancer Foundation

www.skincancer.org

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

https://www.va.gov/QUALITYOFCARE/education/UV_Safety_Awareness_Month.asp

IPRO Healthy Insights is authored by Dr. Clare Bradley, IPRO’s Senior Vice President/Chief Medical Officer, and a nationally recognized public health advocate.

IPRO is a non-profit organization that works with government agencies, providers and patients to measure and improve healthcare for all. For over 35 years we’ve made creative use of clinical expertise, emerging technology and data solutions to make the healthcare system work better.