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July is UV Safety Month

The skin is the body's largest organ. It protects against heat, sunlight, injury, and infection. Let's consider the necessity of protecting our skin.

It's just smart to take good care of your skin

The need to protect your skin from the sun has become very clear over the years, supported by several studies linking overexposure to the sun with skin cancer. The harmful ultraviolet rays from both the sun and indoor tanning "sunlamps" can cause many other complications besides skin cancer - such as eye problems, a weakened immune system, age spots, wrinkles, and leathery skin.

How to protect your skin

There are simple, everyday steps you can take to safeguard your skin from the harmful effects of UV radiation from the sun.

Wear proper clothing: Wearing clothing that will protect your skin from harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays is very important, i.e. long-sleeved shirts and pants. Also, remember to protect your head and eyes with a hat and UV-resistant sunglasses. You can fall victim to sun damage on a cloudy day as well as in the winter, so dress accordingly all year round.

Avoid the burn: Sunburns significantly increase a lifetime risk of developing skin cancer. It is especially important that children be kept from sunburns as well.

Go for the shade: Limit sun exposure during peak burning hours, which are between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Seek shade or create your own with protective clothing and/or a wide-brimmed hat!

Use extra caution when near reflective surfaces, like water, snow, and sand: Water, snow, sand, even the windows of a building can reflect the damaging rays of the sun. That can increase your chance of sunburn, even if you're in what you consider a shady spot.



Use extra caution when at higher altitudes: You can experience more UV exposure at higher altitudes because there is less atmosphere to absorb UV radiation.

Generously apply broad-spectrum sunscreen: The "broad spectrum" variety protects against overexposure to ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) rays. Also use sunscreens that have a sun protection factor (SPF) value of at least 15 for protection against sun-induced skin problems.

Re-apply broad-spectrum sunscreen throughout the day: Even "water-resistant" sunscreen needs to be reapplied throughout the day, especially after sweating or swimming. To be safe, apply sunscreen at a rate of one ounce every two hours. Depending on how much of the body needs coverage, a full-day (six-hour) outing could require one whole tube of sunscreen.

When to protect your skin...

UV rays are their strongest from 10 am to 4 pm Seek shade during those times to ensure the least amount of harmful UV radiation exposure. When applying sunscreen be sure to reapply to all exposed skin at least 20 minutes before going outside. Reapply sunscreen every two hours, even on cloudy days, and after swimming or sweating.

Protecting your eyes...

UV rays can also penetrate the structures of your eyes and cause cell damage. According to the CDC, some of the more common sun-related vision problems include cataracts, macular degeneration, and pterygium (non-cancerous growth of the conjunctiva that can obstruct vision).

- Wear a wide-brimmed hat: To protect your vision, wear a wide-brimmed hat that keeps your face and eyes shaded from the sun at most angles.
- Wear wrap-around style sunglass with 99 or higher UV block: Effective sunglasses should block glare, block 99 to 100% of UV rays, and have a wraparound shape to protect eyes from most angles.

Using the UV index...

When planning your outdoor activities, you can decide how much sun protection you need by checking the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) UV index. This index measures the daily intensity of UV rays from the sun on a scale of 1 to 11. A low UV index requires minimal protection, whereas a high UV index requires maximum protection.



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