

FUN IN THE SUN RESOURCE PACKET

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FUN IN THE SUN: WITHOUT GETTING BURNED

Most people have had a painful sunburn at one time or another. Overexposure to the sun's rays can be extremely harmful, leading to premature aging of the skin, immune-cell disruption, cataracts and other eye problems and sometimes to skin cancer. In severe cases, the sun's ultraviolet rays can cause blisters. Like the effects of other forms of radiation, sunburn is usually a delayed reaction. It only becomes apparent a few hours after exposure to the sun.

Who Is Most at Risk - and When?

Some people are especially prone to sunburn and need to take extra precautions to protect themselves from overexposure. They include people with fair skin, light colored hair, or people who freckle easily. People taking certain antibiotics and other drugs that sensitize them to the sun and people working or playing in the water, sand or snow also need to be vigilant against the sun. Sunburn is most likely to happen on a summer day between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. - or any time of the year in southern areas. It is best not to sunbathe longer than a half hour on your first day in the sun. Many people think that if the day is cloudy, they don't have to protect themselves from the sun, but that's not true. In fact, some of the worst sunburns occur on cloudy days. Burning rays can also penetrate loosely woven clothing and up to 3 feet of water.

Sunburn Prevention

Here are some tips for keeping sunburn-free:

- Avoid sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., when the sun's ultraviolet rays are strongest.
- Use a sunscreen with a skin protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 and reapply it regularly, especially after swimming or sweating heavily. The sun's rays can be reflected up to areas of the body that might not be protected, such as under the chin, so don't neglect those areas.
- Apply zinc oxide cream to nose and lips.
- Wear sunglasses that screen out ultraviolet rays, especially while skiing or using tanning booths.
- Wear protective clothing and a hat on sunny or cloudy but bright days.

Relief of Sunburn Symptoms

A mild sunburn can be treated by taking cool baths or showers, using cool compresses and applications of calamine lotion. Stay out of the sun until the burn has faded completely. Apply an anesthetic spray containing benzocaine, not oily creams or lotions. Take aspirin or acetaminophen to reduce pain and inflammation and avoid clothing that rubs the burned area.

If severe sunburn results in blistered skin, don't apply any topical medicine to the burn unless a doctor advises it. Also don't break the blisters, because that could lead to infection. Only if the blisters break on their own should you bandage them lightly.

Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration and immerse the burned areas in cold water for 10 minutes at a time. Continue to take aspirin or acetaminophen for pain and inflammation. Be sure to see a doctor if a headache, nausea or a high temperature is present. These are signs of heatstroke.

SHEDDING SOME LIGHT ON SUNSCREEN

Summertime. Beach time. Long hours in the sun. Before you head out to the white hot sand, you'll want to pick up some sunscreen. Should you buy SPF 15? SPF 30? How about 45? Should you get a sun block? A sunscreen? Something that's waterproof?

If the numbers and types of sunscreen confuse you, welcome to the club. Many Americans, it seems, are so confused by sunscreens that they don't even use them. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that only about 30 percent of adults regularly use sunscreen.

But take heart. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is writing new rules for sunscreen labeling, to help consumers figure out just what they need. All sunscreen products sold over the counter will need to follow certain labeling standards, and any SPF rating must have been tested to pass muster.

The FDA has proposed creating a new SPF category called 30-plus for any sun protection factor above 30. It has also proposed reducing five sun protection categories to three: minimum, moderate and high. No longer will terms such as "sunblock" and "waterproof" be allowed on labels, because they are inaccurate, the FDA says.

The agency has also listed 16 active ingredients, including zinc oxide and avobenzone, that are allowed in sunscreens.

In addition, the labels will also need to include a statement that emphasizes the importance of sunscreen in preventing skin problems and other harmful effects of the sun.

How do sunscreens work?

When ultraviolet (UV) rays strike the skin, they cause changes, including mutations in DNA. These mutations affect how well the DNA controls cell division, and can lead to cancer, experts say. The longer the skin's exposure to the sun, the greater the risk of developing skin problems.

Sunscreens work by absorbing and reflecting UV rays, preventing them from penetrating the skin. No sunscreen can block out 100 percent of the UV rays, however. That's why terms like "sunblock" are inaccurate.

Because sunlight contains both UVA and UVB rays, it's important to select a sunscreen that blocks both kinds, experts say. All children over 6 months of age and all adults should wear sunscreen. Lighter skinned people, particularly those with red or blond hair, are at greatest risk for burning.

Tips for avoiding the sun

Stay out of the sun, particularly from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., when the sunlight -- and the UV rays -- are strongest. Look for shade, but be aware that a beach umbrella or shade tree can't block all UV rays. And a bright beach or snow-covered ground causes the UV rays to bounce around.

You are still at risk on cloudy days, because clouds block only about 20 percent of UV rays.

If you must be out in the sun, cover up with loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirt and pants to protect your skin.

Wear a hat with a brim three to four inches wide to protect your face, head, neck and ears.

SHEDDING SOME LIGHT ON SUNSCREEN

(Continued)

Wear sunglasses that block as much UVA and UVB rays as possible. Sunglasses that wrap around your eyes are best, because they block UV rays from the sides.

Apply sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 and one that offers protection from both UVA and UVB rays. Use at least an ounce of sunscreen each time you apply it. Reapply every couple hours, or more frequently if you are swimming or sweating.

Remember that water doesn't block UV rays. Even if you spend most of your day in the water, you still need sunscreen.

Children need protection from the sun, too. Give your child a wide-brimmed hat and don't forget the sunscreen.

Warning signs of skin cancer

Up to 1 million Americans are diagnosed with skin cancer each year, and experts say that number is on the rise.

Skin cancer comes in three types: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma. The first two types are the most common forms of skin cancer and are easily treated. If left untreated, however, they can cause disfigurement, but they aren't deadly.

Although melanoma is less common, it is more serious. If caught early, it is almost always curable. Melanoma is more likely than the other two forms of skin cancer to spread to other organs in the body.

The American Cancer Society and other experts urge people to regularly examine their skin for new moles or moles that change their shape or color.

The risk factors for melanoma include: moles, particularly a type called an atypical mole; fair skin; family history of melanoma; people whose immune system has been suppressed; large doses of UV radiation through sun exposure; severe, blistering sunburns, especially during childhood.

Claremont distributes this information to provide employees with general behavioral health information. If you have concerns about these or other behavioral health issues, you can call Claremont to arrange for assistance. You will be directed to an appropriate, experienced professional who can offer guidance in a variety of work and personal matters.

For confidential help, call: 800-834-3773 or visit www.claremonteap.com.

A CLOSE LOOK AT SUNGLASSES

With warmer weather, many people start spending a longer amount of time outdoors. It's important to protect your eyes with sunglasses if you are outside during the day for extended periods, says the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO). Over time, the ultraviolet (UV) radiation in sunlight can contribute to cataracts and macular degeneration.

When shopping for sunglasses, look for those that block 99 to 100 percent of all UV light. Both plastic sunglasses and prescription sunglass lenses absorb some UV light, the AAO says, but makers of eyeglasses boost that absorption by adding chemicals to the lenses or by putting special coatings on the lenses.

Many sunglasses also have polarized lenses. These reduce glare from pavement and water. Keep in mind that polarized lenses alone don't block UV radiation, the AAO says. Polarization often is combined with UV protection, however. The label on the sunglasses will indicate the amount of UV protection offered.

Sunglasses come in varying degrees of darkness. Choose a darker lens if you spend a lot of time in bright light -- for example, on the water. The darkness of the lens does not indicate how much UV light it blocks, though. Always choose a pair that offers the most protection, the AAO says.

Wraparound sunglasses offer more protection against UV radiation than other styles, the AAO says. That's because the larger frames of the wraparound style more completely block sunlight from entering your eyes.

Another feature that some sunglasses offer is a mirrored finish. This reduces the amount of light entering your eyes, the AAO says, but be sure to check the label to see that this type of lens fully protects you against UV radiation.

Other claims

Two other features you may encounter when shopping for sunglasses are the ability to block infrared radiation and the ability to block blue light. The AAO says research has not shown that either infrared radiation or blue light leads to eye disease; it is more important to fully block UV radiation. Lenses that block blue light are usually yellow or amber.

Special concerns

People with macular degeneration or retinal disease, or those who have had cataract surgery, should wear sunglasses whenever they are outdoors, the AAO says. These groups may be at greater risk for damage from UV radiation.

If you take medication that makes your skin more sensitive to light, your eyes also may be more sensitive to UV radiation. Talk to your health care provider if you have questions about your medication. The AAO recommends that you should wear sunglasses that block UV radiation and a hat when you are outdoors.