

# Sun Safety Tips



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

Stay safe in the sun to lower your risk of skin cancer. If you do not protect your skin, the sun can harm your skin over time. Sunlight is a natural source of ultraviolet (UV) rays. Exposure to UV rays from natural sunlight or man-made sources, such as tanning beds, booths, or sunlamps can be harmful and damage your skin leading to:

- Wrinkled skin
- Sagging skin
- Dry skin
- Color changes on the skin
- Skin cancer

The main risk for developing skin cancer is too much sun exposure on unprotected skin. UV rays that damage skin the most are UVA and UVB rays, which cause tanning and burning of the skin.

## Things to remember about sun exposure

- The sunlight coming through your car window can damage your skin.
- You can sunburn on a cloudy day. The sun's rays can pass through clouds on an overcast day.
- Snow, ice, sand, water, and concrete around pools can reflect the sun's rays and increase your chance of sunburn.
- Everyone is at risk for skin damage and should protect their skin. People of all skin colors can get skin cancer.

## How do I protect myself from skin damage?

- Apply sunscreen before going outdoors. Wear sunscreen even on slightly cloudy or cool days.
  - Use caution with spray sunscreens. Avoid getting it into the eyes, nose, or mouth. Spray the sunscreen into your hands, and then apply it to your face, ears, and neck. Massage spray sunscreen onto your skin as you would lotion.
- Try to stay out of the sun between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM when the sun's rays are the strongest.
- Wear protective, tightly woven clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt and pants. If you are sensitive to the sun, consider buying sun-protective lightweight clothing. Use an umbrella for shade.
- Wear a tightly woven hat with a round brim. The brim of the hat should be at least 4 inches wide.
- Protect your eyes from sunlight with sunglasses, even when walking short distances.
- Do not use tanning beds and tanning salons. Their UV light causes early aging and increases your risk of skin cancer.



## How do I choose a sunscreen?

Choose a broad spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. SPF ratings tell you how well the sunscreen blocks the sun's harmful UV rays. Higher numbers give more protection.

- If you are at risk for acne, use oil-free products. If a sunscreen causes stinging, itching, or a rash, try a fragrance-free product that lists titanium dioxide or zinc oxide as an active ingredient.
- Avoid products that combine UV and insect protection in one bottle. The sunscreen effect may be reduced.

Use make-up with at least SPF 15 plus moisturizer on your face. Apply a full teaspoon on your face to provide enough protection from the sun.

Keep babies younger than 6 months out of the sun. At 6 months, use a product made for babies. Limit sun exposure for babies.

Certain medicines or types of make-up may increase your sensitivity to sun.

## How do I use sunscreen?

Apply sunscreen at least 15 minutes before going outdoors. It may be helpful to apply sunscreen in front of a mirror to make sure your skin is fully covered.

It takes at least an ounce of sunscreen, or enough to fill the palm of your hand, to cover all exposed parts of your body. Adjust the amount of sunscreen you use based on your body size.



Remember to put sunscreen on your nose, entire neck, top of your feet, top of your ears, your scalp, and your lips.

Reapply sunscreen every 2 hours when outdoors, even on cloudy days. Put on more sunscreen when it is windy, after being in the water, or after working up a sweat. To help you remember to reapply, keep sunscreen nearby, such as in your purse or backpack.

To keep sunscreen in good condition, store it in a cool, dry place, out of direct sunshine. Check the expiration date on sunscreen. **Throw away expired sunscreen.**

## Check your skin

- **Look at your skin every month.** Ask for the handout, [The ABCDE's of Melanoma and Skin Self-Exam](#). Tell your doctor about any new or unusual bumps, spots, or changes in a mole.
- **Have your skin checked by your doctor each year at your regular health visit.** You may need to have your skin checked more often if you have any of these risk factors for developing skin cancer:
  - › A lighter natural skin color.
  - › Family history of skin cancer.
  - › A personal history of skin cancer.
  - › Exposure to the sun through work and play.
  - › A history of sunburns, especially early in life.
  - › A history of indoor tanning.
  - › Skin that burns, freckles, reddens easily, or becomes painful in the sun.
  - › Blue or green eyes.
  - › Blond or red hair.
  - › Certain types and a large number of moles.