



It's fun to play in the sun, but did you know that too much sun can be bad for you?

If you ever had sunburn, you have felt some of the bad effects of too much sun and ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Too many UV rays can cause more serious health effects too, such as skin cancer; older looking skin, and other skin problems; cataracts and other eye damage; and weakening of the immune system. (The immune system is what keeps us from getting sick.) Children need sun protection education since too much sun when you are young may lead to skin cancer later in life.



Protection from sun exposure is important all year round, not just during the summer or at the beach. UV rays can reach you on cloudy and hazy days, as well as bright and sunny days. UV rays also reflect off of surfaces like water, cement, sand, and snow.



Sunburns

Sunburn is skin damage from the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. Most sunburns cause mild pain and redness but affect only the outer layer of skin (first-degree burn). The red skin might hurt when you touch it. These sunburns are mild and can usually be treated at home.

First Degree Sunburn

Most people in their lives will have been the unfortunate victims of first degree sunburn, which is when exposure to the sun causes a mild, superficial reddening to the skin's surface. Although the associated soreness and skin discoloration may not show up for several hours, the symptoms associated with this type of skin damage are short lived and will be virtually gone in a few days.

Second Degree Sunburn

Second degree sunburn is far more harmful to the skin with potentially lasting damage as a result. This type of sunburn causes damage which can appear soon after exposure to the sun and is recognized by one or more of the following:

- Extremely red appearance to the skin
- Prominent heat felt from the skin's surface
- Severe pain to the skin even when it is not touched
- Blistering which may weep serous fluid
- Swelling to the affected area of the body

This sunburn is also known as 'partial thickness' skin damage and is particularly painful as the damage is so deep that it causes damage to the nerve ending under the surface of the skin. As well as skin damage and pain, in severe cases of this type of sunburn an individual may experience:

- **Fever**
- **Vomiting**
- **Dehydration**
- **Secondary infection**

Those who experience this type of sunburn may require hospital treatment to manage the symptoms associated with the skin damage, such as pain and dehydration.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Your skin type affects how easily you become sunburned. People with fair or freckled skin, blond or red hair, and blue eyes usually sunburn easily. Your age also affects how your skin reacts to the sun. The skin of children younger than 6 and adults older than 60 is more sensitive to sunlight.

There is little you can do to stop skin from peeling after a sunburn-it is part of the healing process. Lotion may help relieve the itching.



The CDC recommends easy options for sun protection:

Use sunscreen with a sun protective factor (SPF) 15 or higher, and both UVA and UVB protection, generously apply it 30 minutes before going outdoors and reapply it frequently throughout the day. A SPF 15 sunscreen blocks 92% of UVB rays while a SPF 30 product blocks 96% of the UVB rays.

Not all sun protection comes in a bottle. Up to 80 percent of skin cancers occur on the head and neck, so wear a hat with a four-inch brim made of tightly woven, opaque fibers to shade the face, head, ears, and neck.

Wear clothing to protect exposed skin. Keep in mind, however, that a typical T-shirt usually has an SPF that is much lower than the recommended SPF 15.

Sunglasses protect the tender skin around the eyes and reduce the risk of developing cataracts.

Wear sunglasses that wrap around and block as close to 100% of both UVA and UVB rays as possible.

Seek shade, especially during midday hours.



What's the most effective sunburn treatment? When does sunburn require medical attention?

Answer

Unfortunately, there's no fast-fix sunburn treatment. Once you have sunburn, the damage is done — although it may take 12 to 24 hours after sun exposure to know the full extent and severity of sunburn, and several days or more for your skin to begin to heal.

In the meantime, the most effective sunburn treatment simply helps ease your discomfort:

- **Keep it cool.** Apply cold compresses — such as a towel dampened with cool water — to the affected skin. Or take a cool bath.
- **Keep it moist.** Apply aloe or moisturizing cream to the affected skin. Avoid products containing alcohol, which can further dry out skin. Beware of sunburn treatment products containing anesthetics, such as benzocaine. There's little evidence that these products are effective. In some cases, they may even irritate the skin.

- **Leave blisters intact.** If blisters form, don't break them. You'll only slow the healing process and increase the risk of infection. If needed, lightly cover blisters with gauze.
- **Take an over-the-counter pain reliever.** If needed, take anti-inflammatory medication — such as aspirin or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others) — according to the label instructions until redness and soreness subside. Don't give children or teenagers aspirin. It may cause Reye's syndrome, a rare but potentially fatal disease.
- **Treat peeling skin gently.** Within a few days, the affected area may begin to peel. This is simply your body's way of getting rid of the top layer of damaged skin. While your skin is peeling, continue to use moisturizing cream.

Consult a doctor for sunburn treatment if:

- Severe sunburn covers a large portion of your body with blisters
- Sunburn is accompanied by a high fever or severe pain
- Severe sunburn doesn't begin to improve within a few days

