

Sun Safety

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You can help yourself avoid risks for skin or eye problems from ultraviolet (UV) radiation that comes from the sun. Ultraviolet radiation that reaches the earth's surface comes in the form of UVA and UVB rays. A few easy actions on your part will protect you from UV rays while outdoors.

Your Skin and the Sun

Your skin has two main layers: the outer (epidermis) and the inner (dermis). The outer layer contains squamous cells, basal cells and melanocyte cells (producing melanin to give your skin color). The inner layer contains blood and lymph vessels, hair follicles and glands.

The sun's UV rays put you at risk for skin cancer, the most common form of cancer in the United States.

There are three types of skin cancer:

- basal cell carcinoma make up 90 percent of all skin cancers in the U.S. It is slow-growing and usually does not spread to other parts of your body. But it can invade and destroy nearby tissue.
- squamous cell carcinoma, which rarely spreads, but does so more often than basal cell carcinoma. It also can invade and destroy nearby tissue.
- malignant melanoma, the most dangerous, because advanced cases can spread to other parts of your body.

Preventing Skin Cancer

Here are some things you can do to help prevent skin cancer:

- Protect your skin from UV radiation. If you are in the sun:
 - Wear protective clothing such as a hat and long sleeves.
 - Put sunscreen on exposed skin. Sunscreen with a SPF (sun protection factor) of 30 or higher provides high protection against sunburn.
- Do skin self-exams on a regular basis:
 - Check all of your skin in a mirror or have someone do it for you. Don't forget hard-to-see places such as your scalp and neck. Become familiar with how your moles look. If you see any change, contact your health care provider.
- Have your skin checked on a regular basis by your health care provider.

Are Sunlamps and Tanning Beds Safe?

No. Sunlamps and tanning beds are artificial sources of UV rays that are also dangerous. It is best to avoid any source of UV rays, whether natural or artificial.

(over)

Your Eyes and the Sun

Research is linking UV rays to eye problems. Problems range from temporary blindness caused by a corneal “burn” to the development of cataracts, which cause cloudy vision and must be removed by surgery.

Preventing Eye Problems

Buying the right kind of sunglasses can help prevent eye problems from UV rays.

For the best eye protection, buy sunglasses that provide at least 98 percent protection from both UVA and UVB rays.

Polarized lenses will not protect against UV rays unless they have a coating added to them that blocks the rays.

Information adapted from the National Institutes of Health and the American Cancer Society.