

UV Safety Month

Tips to Help Keep Your Health On Track!

Why is UV Safety Important?

Since July is UV Safety Month, summer is the one of the best times to be aware of the dangers of UV (ultraviolet) rays and the importance of protecting your skin. Although this is a year-round issue, overexposure to sun and its dangers occurs most during the summer. When skin is exposed to UV rays, it responds by producing melanin, a pigment that helps protect your skin to prevent further sun damage resulting in a “tan”. The problem, however, is that the skin cannot produce the amount of melanin needed fast enough to protect most skin types from overexposure to UV rays. Individuals with fair skin, red hair, and naturally blond hair, or light-colored eyes, produce very little melanin when exposed to UV rays which means their skin will likely skip the tanning stage and go straight to sunburn. Even those with darker skin should still take precautions as anyone can be at risk to overexposure of UV rays. Recognizing that your body can only do so much to protect itself from sun damage means that all of us need to do our part as well. ⁽¹⁾

What is UV Light?

The sun emits radiation in the form of UV light and that light is classified into three types by length of wavelength; UVA, UVB, and UVC. The ozone layer of the Earth’s atmosphere blocks all of the UVC light as it is the one with the shortest wavelengths. UVA and UVB light still reach the Earth’s surface because neither is fully absorbed by the ozone layer. UVA light is the type that is responsible for the wrinkling and/or leathery skin while UVB radiation is responsible for sunburns. More importantly, both types can cause skin cancer which is why it is so important to protect yourself while exposed to the sun. UV levels are also generally highest near surfaces that reflect sunlight, like sand or snow, as the reflection intensifies the light making it more dangerous. Regardless of what conditions may put you at a higher risk for UV danger, always consider taking precautions while in the sun. ⁽²⁾

How Can Overexposure to UV Rays Affect You?

It is important to know that overexposure to UV rays may cause many health issues. Exposing your unprotected skin to UV rays for long periods of time may result in the following: ⁽²⁾

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• various forms of skin cancer caused by sunburns; melanoma being the most serious and deadliest; one person in the U.S. dies every hour from skin cancer ⁽²⁾	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• damage to the eyes like cataracts that could ultimately lead to vision problems and/or blindness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• rapid aging of the skin like early wrinkles, dryness, and leathery skin, commonly referred to as photo aging	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• various growths on the skin that may develop over time
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• accelerated and exacerbated sun damage if exposed to UV rays while taking certain medications or because of certain photosensitivity-specific disorders ⁽³⁾	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• damage to your body’s immune system

How to Protect Skin from UV Damage

There are many things we can all do to protect our skin from UV damage, some of which are: ⁽¹⁾

- Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 or higher.
- Look for one that states it provides “broad spectrum” protection which means it will provide protection from both UVA and UVB rays.
- Choose a water-resistant sunscreen to better protect your skin while wet.
- Reapply sunscreen often since none offer all-day protection.
- Avoid or limit sun exposure between the hours of 10:00 am and 4:00 pm as these are the hours where the sun is at its peak and you are most at risk for sun damage.
- Cover your skin as much as possible if you will be in it for long periods of time by wearing long sleeves and/or sun-protective clothing, wide-brimmed hats, and sunglasses; sunglasses should provide at least 99% UV protection.
- Check the UV index before going out in the sun for prolonged periods of time; index levels range from 2 to 11+ where a level 2 is low risk and levels 6 and above are high risk.

~ Apply sunscreen ~ Limit sun exposure ~ Seek shade ~

~ Dress to block the sun ~ Wear sunglasses ~ Check the UV index ~

(1) www.AmericanHealthCare.com; (2) www.earthgauge.net; (3) www.skincancer.org

This information is intended as informational only; not as a replacement for the medical advice of your physician.