

SUN SAFETY IS NEVER OUT OF SEASON

Summer’s arrival means it’s time for picnics, trips to the pool and beach—and a spike in the number of sunburns. But winter skiers and fall hikers should be as wary of the sun’s rays as swimmers. People who work outdoors also need to take necessary precautions.

The need for sun safety has become clearer over the past 30 years. Studies show that exposure to the sun can cause skin cancer. Harmful rays from the sun — and from sunlamps and tanning beds — may also cause eye problems, weaken your immune system, and give you skin spots, wrinkles, or “leathery” skin.

Sun damage to the body is caused by invisible ultraviolet (UV) radiation. People recognize sunburn as a type of skin damage caused by the sun. Tanning is also a sign of the skin reacting to potentially damaging UV radiation by producing additional pigmentation that provides it with some — but often not enough — protection against sunburn.

Whatever our skin color, we’re all potentially susceptible to sunburn and other harmful effects of exposure to UV radiation. Although we all need to take precautions to protect our skin, people who need to be especially careful in the sun are those who have:

- Pale skin
- Blond, red, or light brown hair
- Been treated for skin cancer
- A family member who’s had skin cancer

If you take medicines, ask your health care professional about sun-care precautions; some medications may increase sun sensitivity.

Spending time in the sun increases the risk of skin cancer and early skin aging. To reduce this risk, consumers should regularly use sun protection measures including:

- Limit time in the sun, especially between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when the sun’s rays are most intense.
- Wear clothing to cover skin exposed to the sun; for example, long-sleeved shirts, pants, sunglasses, and broad-brimmed hats

- Use a water-resistant sunscreen that has an SPF of 15 or higher and broad spectrum (UVA and UVB) coverage.
- Reapply sunscreen at least every 2 hours, more often if you’re sweating or jumping in and out of the water.

The Truth About Sun Exposure

- Skin cancer is the most common cancer diagnosis in the United States. It also happens to be the most preventable type of cancer, but you need to take action to prevent it.
- Nearly 5 million people in the U.S. are treated for skin cancer every year, at an average annual cost of \$8.1 billion.
- The effects of sun exposure are cumulative. Every time you spend time in the sun without protection adds to the long-term damage of your skin. Even a few major sunburns can increase the risk of skin cancer.
- Unprotected skin can be damaged by the sun in as little as 15 minutes.
- Tanned skin is DAMAGED skin. Any color change in your skin — sunburn and suntan alike — is a sign that it’s been damaged.
- The long-term effects of ultraviolet (UV) radiation can also lead to premature aging of the skin. This can include discoloration, wrinkles, and a leathery look and feel.
- A change in your skin is the most common symptom of skin cancer. This could be a new growth, a sore that doesn’t heal, or a change in a mole.



Skin Cancer Prevention and Early Detection

Most skin cancers can be found early with skin exams. Regular exams by your doctor and checking your own skin frequently can help find cancers early, when they are easier to treat.

Regular skin exams are especially important for people who are at higher risk of skin cancer, such as people with reduced immunity, people who have had skin cancer before, and people with a strong family history of skin cancer. Talk to your doctor about how often you should have your skin examined.

- www.surgeongeneral.gov/
- www.hhs.gov/
- www.cdc.gov/cancer/dcpc/resources/features/SkinCancer/
- www.cancer.org/

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Melanoma of the Skin Incidence Rates* by State, 2012

- Data not available
- 7.1 to 17.8
- 17.9 to 21.1
- 21.2 to 23.6
- 23.7 to 34.6

