



Ooh ahh, sunburn pain. If you're looking forward to basking in the sun this summer, you're not alone. What you may not know, however, is prolonged exposure to the sun (ahem, sunburn pain) may also trigger melanoma. The American Cancer Society notes this form of skin cancer is diagnosed in about 60,000 people each year. As for the good news? Protecting your skin from the sun thwarts the stinging pains of sunburn and possible illness which may result.

Easier said than done, but experts recommend staying out of the sun during peak hours of 10AM until 4PM when the sun is at its daily peak. The American Cancer Society advises taking the shadow test to determine the sun's intensity: if your shadow is shorter than your height, the sun's rays are the strongest. Plan indoor activities during this time and if you absolutely must be outdoors, protect your skin.

If you're in direct sunlight, use an SPF greater than 15, recommends Dr. Dina Strachan, board certified dermatologist. "Although SPF 15 is considered adequate protection, most people don't apply enough. If a sunscreen with a higher SPF is used, for example SPF 30, adequate protection will be provided even if half the proper amount is applied." She recommends applying sunscreen 20 minutes before sun exposure since many sunscreens take a few minutes to become effective. "If one waits until one is already in the sun to apply sunscreen, the skin may be on its way to being burned by the time it takes effect."

In addition to applying sunscreen prior to being outdoors, checking expiration dates is also important for their effectiveness. Dr. Craig Eichler recommends checking the expiration date of products. "Extreme temperatures can shorten sunscreen's shelf life such as being in a suitcase or hot car, so it's safest to buy a new bottle at least every summer season." Plus, he explains it's "no excuses" -- if you don't like the way sunscreen feels on your face, try using a gel or spray and check those expiration dates, too.

When applying sunscreen, it's important to note the forgotten areas such as the tops of feet, ears, scalps with thinning hair, and edges of the bathing suit. "Lips -- which can develop precancerous changes and skin cancer from ultraviolet exposure -- are important to protect as well. Lip balms should have an SPF of 15 or higher should be reapplied every two hours while outdoors, like sunscreen," says Dr. Arielle N.B. Kuvar, dermatologist and clinical associate professor of dermatology at New York University School of Medicine.

While it's tempting to soak up some rays on the beach, at a ballgame, or at a pool, there are ways to enjoy being outdoors without being in direct sunlight. Experts recommend bringing a beach umbrella to plant in the sand, sitting under a shady tree, or even

decorating your porch with plants to shield the rays. This way, you're not limiting your outdoor exposure but you are decreasing your exposure to the sun.

If you thought the reflection of the sun on water was just an old wives tale, think again. Experts remind us to heed caution near water and sand since they reflect the damaging rays of the sun which can increase your chance of sunburn. "Sweat-proof and water resistant sunscreens are best for sports activities and swimming," advises Dr. Eichler.

"If you think because you have a tan you don't need to wear sunscreen or that you naturally have dark skin, you couldn't be more wrong," says Dr. Eichler. "People with darker pigmented skin, such as African-Americans, or those who tan easily are still susceptible and should also practice sun safety habits." In other words, don't be a tanning addict; every one should use sunscreen and adhere to the 4-1-1 of sunburn prevention.

Even if you're only exposed to the sun for a few hours, it's important to reapply. As for the rule of thumb? "Reapply after excessive sweating, water contact, or after two hours," says Dr. Eichler. "Products that are 'water resistant' may provide protection for only 40 minutes. Remember that sunscreen usually rubs off when you towel yourself dry, so you will need to reapply.

"Patients believe they only need to wear sunblock during the summer months or only when it's sunny outside," says **Dr. Cameron Rokhsar**, cosmetic dermatologist. He adds, "Although a majority of sun damage occurs in the summer months, up to 25 percent of the damaging effects of UV radiation are incurred in non-summer months." Plus, the sun still emits rays through the clouds. As for the doc's advice? To thwart sunburn, wear sunscreen even when it's cloudy outside and during non-summer months, too.

Hats and shoes and shades, oh my! According to Dr. Diane Baker, dermatologist and clinical professor in the department of dermatology, Oregon Health Sciences University, being properly dressed goes the extra mile in preventing sunburn. "Wear protective clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses, where possible." Experts also recommend wearing loose fitting cotton clothing and shoes or sandals to protect your feet.