

Sun care



The sun is vital for life, and provides an opportunity for fun and outdoor leisure activities. Australians are lucky to enjoy sunshine most of the year, and long hours of sunshine in summer. Too much exposure to the sun however, can cause severe skin damage. The sun's rays contain ultraviolet (UV) A rays that are linked to skin ageing and the formation of wrinkles. UV B rays in sunlight are linked to skin cancer. Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world.

Sunburn

Although sunburn is more common in summer, it can occur at anytime of the year. It can occur in anyone, regardless of their skin colour. Fair-skinned people are particularly at risk because they have less melanin (the pigment that protects the skin from UV rays).

Some signs and symptoms of sunburn are:

- dark pink or red skin in exposed areas
- the affected area is warm or hot to touch
- pain, itchiness and tenderness
- swelling and blisters that will dry out in a few days, causing skin peeling
- severe sunburn can also cause headache, fever and nausea.

Sunburn can be caused by:

- over exposure to the sun's rays
- photo-toxicity caused by medicines that make the skin more sensitive to sunburn
- sun tanning lamps.

Skin cancer

Signs of skin cancer include:

- skin spots that change size, shape or colour
- little sores on the skin that are crusty and don't heal
- pale red, little, round lumps on the skin
- thick, scaly, red, dry patches of skin that can look like ulcers and bleed.

The three main types of skin cancer are melanoma, basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC). Melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer.

Too much exposure to UV rays can also damage your eyes.

Sun exposure can also cause solar keratosis, a skin condition common in older people. It commonly occurs in areas of skin most exposed to the sun such as the face, hands and arms. Solar keratosis appears as red, flat, scaly, dry patches on the affected skin.

Lifestyle options

The best thing for taking care in the sun, is to avoid over-exposure. If you are getting sunburnt, get out of the sun as quickly as possible. Use cool water or ice packs to cool the skin (but avoid applying ice directly to the skin).

The Cancer Council Australia recommends:

- **Slip** – slip on sun protective clothing when exposed to the sun, for example wear a sunshirt while swimming outside.
- **Slop** – slop on sunscreen which is at least SPF 30+. SPF stands for sun protection factor. Apply sunscreen at least 20 minutes before going out in the sun. Reapply sunscreen every two hours, or more often if you swim or sweat a lot. Use a waterproof one if needed. Use enough sunscreen – see below.
- **Slap** – slap on a wide-brimmed hat that shades your eyes, face, neck and ears.
- **Seek** – seek shade whenever outside, such as under trees or any roof covers. Avoid exposure to the sun during the middle of the day as the sun's rays are strongest then.
- **Slide** – slide on sunglasses that meet Australian Standards for sun protection. Use wrap around ones to prevent the sun's rays getting in from the sides.

How much sunscreen do you need to apply?

The Cancer Council recommends adults should use about one teaspoon (5 ml) for each area of the body such as each arm, each leg, front of body, back of body and face (including the neck and ears). This is a total of about 35 ml of sunscreen for the full body.

Some people may be concerned about the nanoparticles in sunscreens, however the Cancer Council advises that sunscreens are safe to use.

Pharmacy options

Always inform pharmacy staff if you are taking any other medicines, or if you have any other health conditions.

Some medicines and health conditions can make your skin more sensitive to the sun's rays. Your pharmacist can recommend products that can soothe and provide relief for sunburn such as:

- cooling gels (e.g. aloe vera gels)
- pain and fever relieving medicines such as oral paracetamol
- numbing skin sprays
- oral rehydration products if you are dehydrated.

Prevention is the preferred option and pharmacies have a wide range of broad-spectrum sunscreens, and trained staff can recommend an appropriate one for you.

See a doctor if:

- your sunburn gets worse or bleeds
- you feel dizzy, nauseous, or vomit after exposure to the sun
- you see any skin changes or signs of skin cancer suggested above.

More information

Health Direct: www.healthdirect.gov.au

Cancer Council Australia: www.cancer.org.au

Disclaimer: The information provided is a guide only, is current at time of publishing, and is not intended to replace the advice of your pharmacist or doctor.

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