Smarter Sun Protection

When the sun is high, it's more important than ever to practice sun safety.

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When the sun is high, it's more important than ever to practice sun safety. Wearing sunscreen protects against all skin cancers, including melanoma of the skin, the fifth most common cancer among adults. But casually slapping on the sunscreen once you get outside won't do the trick. Here's what will.

Boost your sun protection factor (SPF). You may have heard that really high SPF sunscreens don't make much difference, but a 2018 study by the American Academy of Dermatology found SPF 100–rated sunblock offers measurably more protection against ultraviolet (UV) rays than SPF 50. Of course, SPF 50 still protects against 98% of UVB light! Choose a sunscreen labeled "broad spectrum," meaning it protects against both UVA and UVB rays, as well as "water resistant."

Use sunscreen right. People use less than half the amount they should, on average, so be generous. Apply your first coat 30 minutes before you go out, covering your skin from your scalp to the soles of your feet. Reapply at least every two hours, or right after working up a sweat or taking a swim.

Cover up. A white T-shirt offers little protection, but dark clothes, like jeans, are almost total sun blockers. Some clothes come with an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) rating, which is like SPF for clothing. A UPF 50 garment blocks the sun as effectively as a broad-spectrum SPF 50 sunscreen.

Don't forget your eyes! The American Academy of Ophthalmology advises wearing sunglasses labeled "100% UV protective" or "UV400." "Polarized" lenses reduce glare but won't protect your eyes unless they carry the UV label.

Stay inside during peak hours. The sun is strongest between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., so take a break in the shade. The water will still be warm after peak sun time!

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10 Sun Safety Tips

1. Wear broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen of at least SPF 50 whenever you go out.
2. Apply sunscreen at least 30 minutes before going out, and reapply every two hours you spend

outdoors.
3. Getting wet? When you dry off, reapply sunscreen.
4. Hand-apply cream or gel sunscreen first, then use sprays for easy reapplication.
5. Cover up with UPF-rated clothes, hats and swimwear.
6. Keep your eyes safe with 100% UV-protective sunglasses.
7. Hide out under a UPF-rated umbrella or beach tent.
8. Limit your sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.
9. Regularly examine your skin, and see a dermatologist annually.
10. Always use sunscreen outdoors, even on cloudy days.

For tips on talking with your doctor, eating well during treatment, managing stress and more, click here.

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