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[Protecting Your Skin From the Sun](#) [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 06/2015



[3] Listen to the [Cancer.Net Podcast: Protecting Your Skin From the Sun](#) [3], adapted from this content.

UV radiation and skin cancer

Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation is the leading cause of skin cancer. There are two types of UV radiation:

- **Ultraviolet A (UVA).** UVA radiation is able to pass through glass and may cause premature aging and wrinkling of the skin. Research suggests that UVA may also play a role in causing basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma.
- **Ultraviolet B (UVB).** UVB radiation is more closely linked with the development of skin cancer and melanoma. UVB radiation causes sunburn and does not penetrate through car windows or other types of glass.

It is important to protect your skin from both UVA and UVB radiation.

Sunscreen

Sun damage builds up over time. It is important to use sunscreen every day, even if it's cloudy.

- Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB radiation. Make sure it is water resistant and has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher. Other types of sunscreen may help prevent sunburn, but they will not protect against skin cancer.
- Use a lip balm or lipstick that contains sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30.
- Apply at least 1 ounce of sunscreen 15 to 30 minutes before going outdoors. One ounce is enough sunscreen to fill a shot glass.
- Reapply sunscreen to your entire body every 2 hours. Reapply every hour if you are swimming or sweating.
- Sunscreen creams are better for dry skin. Gels are better for the scalp or hairy areas.
- Wear sunscreen year round whenever you are outside.
- Do not use sunscreens if they have expired.

Other sun protection tips

- Limit sun exposure between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM, when the sun's rays are the most intense. Practice the shadow rule: if your shadow is shorter than you, you should find shade.
- Pay attention to the UV index, which is often included in the weather report. This index is a relative measure of how damaging exposure to the sun will be on any particular day. The index is a scale of 1 to 10+. When the index is 10 or higher, people should stay indoors, if possible.
- Be careful around water, snow, or sand. These surfaces reflect the damaging rays of the sun, increasing your risk of getting sunburned.
- Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and a hat that shades the face, neck, and ears. Dark clothing with tightly woven fabric blocks more sun than white or loosely woven fabrics. For additional protection, look for clothing made with special sun-protective materials.

- Wear sunglasses with 99% to 100% UV absorption. They will provide optimal protection for the eyes and the surrounding skin.
- Be even more cautious if you are taking medications that may make you more sensitive to the sun. These include specific types of antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, antifungals, blood pressure medications, and chemotherapies.
- Keep babies younger than 6 months old completely covered and in the shade.
- Avoid recreational sunbathing.
- Do not use sun lamps, tanning beds, or tanning salons.

More Information

[Skin Cancer \(Non-Melanoma\): Risk Factors and Prevention](#) [4]

[Melanoma: Risk Factors and Prevention](#) [5]

[10 Tips for Protecting Your Skin from the Sun](#) [6]

[Winter Skin Care Tips](#) [7]

Additional Resources

[American Academy of Dermatology: Prevent skin cancer](#) [8]

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: What Can I Do to Reduce My Risk of Skin Cancer?](#) [9]

[U.S. Food and Drug Administration: Sunscreen](#) [10]

[The Skin Cancer Foundation: Prevention Guidelines](#) [11]

[U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: SunWise Program](#) [12]

Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/prevention-and-healthy-living/protecting-your-skin-sun>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/22981>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19621>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19254>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/33651>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/30781>

[8] <https://www.aad.org/spot-skin-cancer/learn-about-skin-cancer/prevent-skin-cancer>

[9] http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/prevention.htm

[10]

<http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/UnderstandingOver-the-CounterMedicines/ucm239463.htm>

[11] <http://www.skincancer.org/Guidelines/>

[12] <http://www.epa.gov/sunwise>