

# Protecting Your Skin From the Sun - Topic Overview

## Protecting your skin

Most [skin cancer](#) can be prevented. Use the following tips to protect your skin from the sun. You may decrease your chances of developing skin [cancer](#) and help prevent [wrinkles](#).

## Avoid sun exposure

The best way to prevent a [sunburn](#) is to avoid sun exposure.

Stay out of the midday sun (from 10 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon), which is the strongest sunlight. Find shade if you need to be outdoors. You can also calculate how much [ultraviolet \(UV\)](#) exposure you are getting by using the shadow rule: A shadow that is longer than you are means UV exposure is low; a shadow that is shorter than you are means the UV exposure is high.

Other ways to protect yourself from the sun include wearing protective clothing, such as:

- Hats with wide 4 in brims that cover your neck, [ears](#), [eyes](#), and scalp.
- Sunglasses with UV ray protection.
- Loose-fitting, tightly woven clothing that covers your arms and legs.

## Preventing sun exposure in children

You should start protecting your child from the sun when he or she is a baby. Because children spend a lot of time outdoors playing, they get most of their lifetime sun exposure in their first 18 years.

- Keep babies younger than 6 months of age out of the sun. If [sunscreen](#) is needed, a small amount on the face or the back of the hands is not harmful.
- Teach children the ABCs of how to protect their skin from getting sunburned.
  - o **A = Away.** Stay away from the sun in the middle of the day (from 10 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon).
  - o **B = Block.** Use a sunscreen with a [sun protection factor \(SPF\)](#) of 15 or higher to protect babies' and children's very sensitive skin.
  - o **C = Cover up.** Wear clothing that covers the skin, hats with wide brims, and sunglasses with UV protection. Even children 1 year old should wear sunglasses with UV protection.
  - o **S = Speak out.** Teach others to protect their skin from sun damage.

## Sunscreen protection

If you can't avoid being in the sun, use a sunscreen to help protect your skin while you are in the sun.

- Use a sunscreen that has a [sun protection factor \(SPF\)](#) of at least 30 or higher. Sunscreens that say "broad-spectrum" can protect the skin from ultraviolet A and B ([UVA and UVB](#)) rays. Sunscreens come in lotions, gels, creams, and ointments.
- Apply the sunscreen at least 30 minutes before going in the sun.
- Apply sunscreen to all the skin that will be exposed to the sun, including the nose, ears, neck, scalp, and lips. Sunscreen needs to be applied evenly over the skin and in the amount recommended on the label. Most sunscreens are not completely effective because they are not applied correctly. It usually takes about 1 fl oz to cover an adult's body.
- Apply sunscreen every 2 to 3 hours while in the sun and after [swimming](#) or sweating a lot. The SPF value decreases if a person sweats heavily or is in water, because water on the skin reduces the amount of protection the sunscreen provides. Sunscreen effectiveness is also affected by the wind, humidity, and altitude.

- Use lip balm or cream that has SPF of 30 or higher to protect your lips from getting sunburned or developing [cold sores](#).
- Use a higher SPF at higher elevations or in tropical climates.

Some sunscreens say they are water-resistant or waterproof and can protect for about 40 minutes in the sun if a person is doing a water activity. Apply sunscreen more often if you are in water. Wet skin can burn easily, so it is important to protect your skin even if you do not feel that you are getting sunburned. Wearing a T-shirt while swimming does not protect your skin unless sunscreen has also been applied to your skin under the T-shirt.

The following tips about sunscreen will help you use it more effectively:

- [Older adults](#) should always use a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 to protect their very sensitive skin.
- If you have sensitive skin that burns easily, use a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30.
- If you have [dry skin](#), use a cream or lotion sunscreen.
- If you have oily skin or you work in dusty or sandy conditions, use a gel, which dries on the skin without leaving a film.
- If your skin is sensitive to skin products, use a sunscreen that is free of chemicals and alcohol.
- If you have had a skin reaction ([allergic reaction](#)) to a sunscreen, look for one that is free of para-[aminobenzoic acid](#) (PABA), preservatives, and perfumes. These ingredients may cause skin reactions.
- If you are going to have high exposure to the sun, consider using a [physical sunscreen](#) (sunblock), such as zinc oxide, which will stop all sunlight from reaching the skin.
- If you need to use sunscreen and insect repellent with DEET, do not use a product that combines the two. You can apply sunscreen first and then apply the insect repellent with DEET, but the sunscreen needs to be reapplied every 2 hours.

Do not use tanning booths to get a tan. Artificial tanning devices can cause skin damage and increase the risk of skin cancer.