

Your Health

by Dr. Paul Roumeliotis

Sun Protection for Everyone

Now that we are approaching summer it is a great time to talk about sun safety. It is currently believed that the more a person is exposed to sun early in life, the higher the chances are that skin cancer will develop at an older age. The best way to prevent this long-term “potential sun-induced” consequence is to protect children and ourselves from the sun at all times.

Here are some important sun protection facts and tips:

- When spending time outdoors during the spring and summer months, it is important to remember that the sun’s rays are the strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Sunscreens are designed to basically block the sun’s rays. The “Sun Protection Factor” (SPF) is a measure of how much protection the sunscreen offers. For example, an SPF of 30 means that a person can stay out in the sun 30 times longer than without the sunscreen. The recommended SPF is 15 (at the very least) and the sunscreen should be “broad-spectrum” (protects against both UV-A and UV-B light rays).
- Sunscreens should be applied 30 minutes before sun exposure because it takes some time for them to work on the skin. Remember that even “waterproof” sunscreens need to be re-applied every two hours. There really is no such thing as a fully waterproof sunscreen.
- Make sure that all potentially exposed areas are covered including the nose, cheeks, tops of the ears and the shoulders. While putting sunscreen on the face, avoid the eyes. If the screen burns the eyes, try a new type or one that can be applied with a stick applicator.
- Never use suntan oil, as it offers no protection and causes the skin to burn quicker. In addition, sunscreens that contain PABA should be avoided, especially in children, as this chemical is very irritating.
- Sunrays can go through clouds and can cause damage even on cloudy days. In the shade, the sun’s rays can bounce from sand, concrete or snow, so keep that in mind as well.
- Sunglasses with UVA/B protection are also recommended as direct sunrays to the eye may cause cataracts.
- Babies less than six months of age should be kept out of direct sunlight. Baby should be dressed in clothing that covers all of the body (long sleeves, long leg pants, etc.). Put your baby in the shade (under a tree, stroller canopy, etc.).
- Hats or bonnets are also necessary. A cap with a bill is helpful; however, the bill should be facing forward (not like a catcher in baseball) in order to protect the face. Also, tightly woven clothes offer better protection than clothes with a wider weave.
- If you or your child gets sunburn, stay or keep him/her completely out of the sun until the burn is fully healed.

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