



Sunburn Treatment and Protection

Time for a tan! Or is it? Many people find themselves in the sun because they want to "get some sun" while others have to work or get to play in the sun. Tanning the skin is actually dangerous especially when skin is unprotected and can result in skin cancer or early aging.

So what exactly is a sunburn? It is a reddening of the skin that occurs following exposure to the sun or other ultraviolet light. The rays of the sun are the strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. This is the time when you are most likely to get a sunburn. You may not notice the full effect of a sunburn until approximately 24 hours after the exposure. The symptoms are usually temporary however the damage to the skin cells is often permanent which can lead to serious issues such as skin cancer. When you notice your skin is red and painful, the damage is already done. Certain types of medication and certain illness can also make people more likely to acquire a sunburn.

So how do you protect yourself and your family and if you do find yourself a bit redder than you were planning, how do you treat it?

Number 1...Wear sunscreen with both UVA and UVB protection and SPF of 30 or higher! The higher the SPF, the greater the protection. Even if you are only planning to be outside for a short time, put it on as a sunburn can occur in a short amount of time. Fair skinned people can burn in as little as 15 minutes of exposure especially during the middle of the day. Children over 6 months can use sunscreen safely but should still be kept out of the sun if at all possible. Even if you are trying for a summer tan, do so wisely by applying sunscreen generously and frequently to avoid a sunburn. This will also avoid premature aging of your skin!

Wear a hat. There are many stylish looking hats to help cover your face and the top of your head. A wide-brimmed hat offers the best protection for both face and ears but if you wear a baseball cap, don't forget the sunscreen, especially for your neck and ears.

Get out of the sun. If you feel the warmth and stinging of the skin, find the shade. Wearing a cool long sleeve cotton shirt and pants can also help protect your skin. And don't forget the UV protective sunglasses!

So you got a sunburn? How do you ease the discomfort?

Aloe Vera gel or spray helps the skin recover and feels good. Storing it in the fridge and applying it cold provides extra relief. Creams with vitamin C and E may help limit damage to skin cells (Avoid oil-based creams and lotions).

Cold compresses and baths also help relieve some of the discomfort from a sunburn.

If you experience blisters, keep covered with dry bandages

Avoid applying lotion (especially those containing butter, Vaseline or other oil-based products) may lock in the heat and sweat cannot escape increasing the risk of infection.

Tylenol or ibuprofen may help relieve minor discomfort. Avoid aspirin in children. Wearing loose cotton clothing may also help with discomfort.

Drink lots of water

If you experience severe symptoms including severe/painful blisters, significant peeling of skin and/or flu-like symptoms (dizziness, nausea/vomiting, rapid pulse or breathing, chills, extreme thirst and no urine output) you should contact your healthcare provider.