

## Safety in the Sun

### How to stay safe this summer

**Summer is finally here!** While we welcome the warmer temperatures and sunshine, the summer sun and high temperatures affect everyone, whether working outdoors or having fun in the sun. It's important to take precautions to protect your skin and eyes, stay safe in high temperatures and avoid sunburns, which can increase your risk of skin cancer. According to the 2007 U.S. Cancer Statistics Working Group of the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Cancer Institute, skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. Over 90 percent of skin cancers in the United States are caused by the sun, and experts say this is a growing epidemic.

The first step to staying safe is to be aware of risks and establish habits to protect yourself from sun and heat exposure. Use our checklist to help make this your best (and safest) summer ever.

### Protect yourself from sun exposure

The best way to prevent sunburn is to avoid sun exposure when possible. Stay out of the strong, skin-searing midday sun—from 10:00 in the morning to 4:00 in the afternoon. If you must be outside during this time, protect yourself from the sun include wearing protective clothing, such as:

- Hats with wide 4-inch 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

### Don't leave home without 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, in addition to protective clothing. Consider these valuable tips:

- 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, ointments and sprays. Lotions and creams are best to use if you have dry skin. 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.



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- Apply the sunscreen at least 30 minutes before going in the sun. Apply evenly to all the skin that will be exposed to the sun, including the nose, ears, neck, scalp and lips. Use lip balm or cream that has SPF of 30 or higher to protect your lips from getting sunburned or developing cold sores.
- Apply sunscreen every 2 to 3 hours while in the sun and after swimming or sweating a lot. Wet skin actually burns more easily. 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.
- If you have had a skin or allergic reaction to a sunscreen, look for one that is free of para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA), preservatives and fragrances. 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.
- Don't use old sunblock—buy it fresh every year for best results.

### Check your medicine cabinet

Certain medications—prescription and over-the-counter—make your skin more sensitive to the sun and susceptible to sunburn. These include some antibiotics (tetracyclines, quinolones and sulfa drugs), diuretics (water pills), glyburide (for diabetes), amiodarone (for heart conditions) and NSAID pain relievers like celecoxib and ibuprofen. Skin care products containing alpha hydroxy acid and retin-A also contain warnings about sun sensitivity. Speak with your doctor or ask your pharmacist if any of your prescriptions or over-the-counter medicines are putting your skin at risk. And always read the label directions and warnings carefully for all prescription and over-the-counter medications.

### Commit to hats

Protection for the face and other parts of the head can be as simple as wearing a hat. While you may feel most comfortable in your favorite baseball cap, it may not provide the best coverage of your face, temple, ear and neck areas. Other types of hats provide better protection, such as wide-brimmed hats, pith helmets, hats with double brims or removable flaps and an Australian-style hat with a full brim. Choose a hat that is cool enough to be worn on hot days, yet is practical for other weather conditions, such as blowing dust, high humidity, strong wind gusts and rain showers. And most importantly...commit to wearing it.



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## Don't forget your eyes

In addition to increasing risk of skin cancer, prolonged exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays can be damaging to the eyes. Always wear sunglasses to protect your eyes while working outdoors. Even the most effective hats can block only 50 percent of the ultraviolet rays that reach the eyes. A good shade hat combined with the use of sunglasses is a better way to protect eyes from sun exposure.

Use caution when selecting sunglasses because they vary widely in the amount of protection from ultraviolet radiation. A label on the lens indicates its UV rating or percentage of ultraviolet rays blocked by the sunglasses (the best rating is 100). Don't buy them if no information is provided by the manufacturer—the sunglasses may not offer any added protection.

## Beware of dashboard glare

If you have a bad habit of placing paperwork onto your dashboard, it could cause dangerous "veiling glare" when hit by the sun's direct rays. This glare reflects onto the windshield, lowering visibility, delaying reaction time and often obscuring objects from view. Instead, put paperwork in a briefcase. Cars and trucks with light-color or glossy dashboards can also expose you to glare, so drive more carefully in summer. And the next time you're buying a new vehicle, look for a darker, non-glossy dashboard.

## Keep your cool

When working outside, staying cool as cool as possible is a necessity. Too much heat can cause a number of problems, including life-threatening heat stroke (when the body can't regulate internal temperature and begins storing heat, rather than eliminating it). Some daily solutions include wearing a bandanna or baseball hat soaked in water. The evaporation will make the temperature on your skin feel significantly lower than the outside air. You might also consider garments with cooling systems built in, such as vests with pockets for gel packs. When possible, find a cool place to rest or take breaks in and of course, drink plenty of liquids.



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## Drink up and drink often

When working in the heat, a person may produce as much as 2 to 3 gallons of sweat. Because many heat disorders involve dehydration of the body, it is essential that water intake during the workday be about equal to the amount of sweat produced. But don't depend on thirst to signal when and how much to drink. Keep your body well hydrated with plenty of liquids all day long—drink about 6 to 8-ounces of fluids every 15 to 20 minutes. Choose water and sports drinks over cola, iced tea and other caffeinated drinks. Caffeine causes you to lose fluids more quickly. Alcohol can also cause dehydration during prolonged periods of heat.

There is no optimum temperature of drinking water, but most people tend not to drink warm or very cold fluids as readily as they will cool ones. People taking certain medications (e.g. medications for blood pressure control, diuretics or water pills) should consult their physician to determine if any side effects could occur during excessive heat exposure. **CAUTION: Persons with heart problems or those on low sodium or fluid restricted diets who work in hot environments should consult a physician about what to do under these conditions.**

If for some reason, salt replacement is required, the best way to compensate for the loss is to add a little extra salt to the food or use sports drinks. Salt tablets should not be used.

## Make sun protection contagious

These habits—using sunscreen, wearing hats and protective clothing, using sun glasses and drinking plenty of liquids—are important for everyone (including children) to incorporate into their daily summer routine. Get everyone involved in practicing sun protection, and pester your family members and co-workers until they become sun safe.

*This information was adapted from the Healthwise® Knowledgebase, which can be accessed by logging on to Highmarkbcbs.com, Click on "Health Topics" to search the Healthwise® Knowledgebase*

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