

Wellness

Sun safety

Tips for keeping safe in the sun

Being out in the sun is often a big part of the Australian way of life. However, we need to protect ourselves from its damaging effects. UVA and UVB rays – the types of ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun that reach the Earth's surface – can cause sunburn, skin ageing, eye damage and skin cancer. By following these three simple tips, you can protect your skin and eyes from damage and still enjoy the Australian outdoors.

Cover up...

Your skin

Wearing clothing and hats is one of the best ways to protect your skin from the sun. Choose a wide-brimmed hat to reduce the amount of UV radiation reaching your face and eyes, along with long-sleeved tops, and trousers or long skirts to help protect your arms and legs. Close-weave materials are best as they block out most of the UV rays. If there's a chance you'll get wet, try sun protection factor (SPF) clothing and sunsuits.

And your eyes

You might think that sunglasses are just about reducing the sun's glare but they are more than that – they are your eyes' first line of defence against sun damage. In the short term, UV exposure can make the eyes inflamed, irritated and sensitive. Repeated exposure to UV radiation over long periods can lead to eye conditions that cause vision loss, such as cataracts (cloudy lenses) and macular degeneration (damage to the retina).

UV radiation can damage your eyes at any time, so it's important to wear sunglasses whenever you are outdoors during daylight hours – even when it's cloudy. Wraparound sunglasses are best as they protect the skin around your eyes and stop radiation coming in from around the sides of the glasses. And remember, not all sunglasses sold in Australia offer good UV protection. Go for sunglasses with

either an eye protection factor (EPF) of 9 or 10, a lens category of 2–4, or a UV rating of 400 to get good UV protection for your eyes.

Wear sunscreen

Sunscreens are safe so don't be shy about applying them. Apply about one teaspoon worth of sunscreen to each of the following body areas, about 20 minutes before you go outside:

- your face, neck and ears
- each arm
- each leg
- the front of your body
- your back.

If you have an allergic reaction to sunscreen, talk to your doctor or try another brand. Sunscreens that contain titanium dioxide as the main ingredient are best for sensitive skin.

Sunscreen 'must have' checklist

SPF30 or higher

Broad spectrum UVA and UVB protection
Check the expiry date
Store below 30°C

Don't forget to re-apply!

Remember to re-apply sunscreen every 2 hours. Water can make sunscreen less effective, so you need to re-apply sunscreen more often if you are swimming. You may also need to apply sunscreen more frequently if you sweat a lot. Remember that sunscreen is only one form of sun protection and it should be used in combination with other measures.

Seek shade

Where possible, seek out shady areas under trees, and use umbrellas or canopies when outdoors.

Even if it is not sunny, you still get sunburnt on cloudy days – UV radiation can penetrate clouds and become more intense by reflecting off the bottom of the clouds.

What about Vitamin D?

It's true that the sun is important for helping your body make vitamin D, so we need to balance sun protection with maintaining healthy vitamin D levels. During the Australian summer, most adults only need a few minutes of mid-morning or mid-afternoon sun exposure to the arms and hands on most days of the week to maintain adequate vitamin D levels. It's important to remember that the amount of exposure you need will vary based on the time of year, your skin type (darker skin requires longer exposure), and where you live. For more details about this, visit the Cancer Council Australia website.

Further Information



Cancer Council Australia
www.cancer.org.au

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