



TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY'S LARGEST ORGAN – YOUR SKIN!

Your skin performs many vital functions to protect you. It's your first layer of defense, acting as a barrier to prevent germs from entering the body and causing infections. Sweat glands and tiny blood vessels in your skin help to control your body temperature. The nerve endings in your skin alert your body to potential dangers by detecting pressure, pain, heat, and cold, so you can quickly react. When exposed to the sun's ultraviolet rays, the skin manufactures Vitamin D, an essential vitamin for healthy teeth and bones. Healthy skin protects your body against germs and damage to your bones, muscles and internal organs.

Given all that your skin does, it's important to keep it healthy. There are many things you can do including keeping your skin clean, preventing sun damage, drinking plenty of water, getting enough sleep and maintaining a healthy diet. This month's issue of SMART Health Insights focuses on skin health. To get you started, explore some simple tips on how to keep your skin healthy. Take good care of your skin, so your skin can keep taking good care of you.

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7 TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE IN THE SUN

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A few years ago I had a small skin cancer removed, making me one of the nearly 5 million people treated for skin cancer every year in the United States. While it will never recur, no one wants to hear the word cancer. It's scary and unsettling. And now I have a history of skin cancer, putting me at increased risk for another one down the road. I wish I had known growing up what I know now about the sun's harmful rays.

Today, skin cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in the United States. But there's a lot you can do to lower your risk. The key is to get serious about protecting yourself from ultraviolet (UV) light, whether from the sun or indoor tanning beds. Working toward a "healthy" glow is many women's favorite summer pastime, but that glow is actually skin damage. It's not a sign of health, even if you tan and don't burn. Just in case you need another reason to be sun smart, too much sun exposure causes premature signs of aging, like wrinkles and age spots. We all have friends and family members with sun damage who are too young to look that old.

As we head into the summer months, I hope you'll keep your skin's health — present and future — in mind. Use these seven tips to stay safe in the sun.

- 1. Wear protective clothing.** If possible, wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and hats. Hats with wide brims not only cover your face, but they also protect other easy-to-forget spots like your ears and your scalp.
- 2. Make sunglasses your favorite accessory.** Sunglasses shield your eyes from UV rays that can cause eye problems, like cataracts. Pricy sunglasses don't guarantee better protection. Look for a pair that says it blocks 99% or 100% of UVB and UVA rays.
- 3. Limit your sun time, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.** That's when the sun's rays are at their strongest.

Plan your outdoor activities early in the morning or later in the afternoon. You can also find or create shade during those hours. At the park? Sit under a tree. At the beach? Bring a beach umbrella. Just a regular day? Plan indoor lunch breaks or schedule nap times during those hours.

4. Use sunscreen and use it right. UV rays can damage your skin in as little as 15 minutes. To protect your skin, put sunscreen on every part of your body that will be exposed to the sun at least 15 minutes before going outside, even if it's cloudy out. Sunscreen is most effective when used with other sun protection methods, like those mentioned above.

When choosing sunscreen, pick one with at least SPF 15 and that offers broad-spectrum protection from both ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) rays. One coat of sunscreen doesn't last all day. **You need to reapply sunscreen every two hours**, and don't forget to put it on your hands and feet and to reapply after swimming or sweating.

5. Say no to tanning. There's no such thing as a safe tan, whether you're inside or outside. It's a myth that indoor tanning is a safer alternative to sun tanning. Tanning beds, tanning booths, and sunlamps expose you to intense UV radiation, which increases your risk of skin cancer and skin damage.

6. Give up the vitamin D excuse. Tanning isn't a safe way to get vitamin D. If you're concerned about your vitamin D levels, talk to your doctor about the sources that are best for you.

7. Get to know your skin. Skin cancer is easier to treat when caught early, so get to know your skin and watch for changes. Look for new skin markings, like moles, bumps, scaly spots, or places where your skin has changed color. Watch moles for changes in size, texture, color, or shape. Take note if a mole has uneven edges, differences in color, or one half that is different than the other. You can also watch for moles, sores, or growths that continue to bleed, won't heal, or look different from any other growth you may have. Talk to your doctor if you notice any of these changes.

And don't forget to keep the kids safe in the sun. All of these tips are important for them, including hats and sunglasses. Just as sun damage to our skin starts when we are young, so can safe sun habits.

Why not embrace your natural skin tone this summer? No amount of tanning will ever actually change your skin tone, so try finding new ways to feel good about you. A new lipstick or blouse that compliments your skin can work wonders for brightening up your look. Love your skin this season and all year long by taking steps to protect it, and share this blog post with your friends, family, and coworkers. The battle against skin damage is year-round.

HOW SAFE AND EFFECTIVE IS YOUR SUNSCREEN?

By Carole Tanzer Miller

<https://www.webmd.com/melanoma-skin-cancer/news/20170811/how-safe-and-effective-is-your-sunscreen>

It may be easier than ever to find sunscreen with all the right stuff, but be sure to read the label or you could still get burned.

Most sunscreens sold at major U.S. retailers and their websites now offer broad-spectrum protection, are water-resistant and have an SPF (sun protection factor) of 30 or higher as the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recommends, a new study found.

But more than a third of sunscreens sold by several of the nation's largest retailers fell short. Forty-one percent of sunscreens did not meet all three recommendations, researchers from the University of Miami and University of Michigan reported.

Tanning and bronzing products, in particular, tended to be lacking, the researchers said.

In a follow-up to a 2014 study, the researchers checked more than 470 sunscreens available at big pharmacy websites to see if they met the AAD guidelines.

"Even in just three years, we've seen pretty impressive improvement," said Dr. Matilda Nicholas, a board-certified dermatologist at Duke Health in Durham, N.C. "But I think there's still confusion, based on what my patients ask me."

The study found:

- More than 8 out of 10 sunscreens sold at two chains have the recommended SPF of 30 or higher.
- More than 9 out of 10 products checked give broad-spectrum protection, meaning they block both UVA (ultraviolet A) and UVB (ultraviolet B) rays. UVA penetrates the skin more deeply and is thought to cause more skin aging. UVB rays are the main cause of sunburn. Both cause skin cancer, the most common cancer in the United States, affecting 1 in 5 Americans, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation.
- More than three-quarters of sunscreens evaluated are water-resistant for 40 to 80 minutes.
- In all, about 70 percent of products met all three AAD recommendations. As with the 2014 study, tanning and bronzing products were far less likely to do so.

"We had hypothesized that not much would have changed, but there were some positive results and hopefully, we will continue to move in the right direction," said study corresponding author Dr. Ariel Eva Eber, of the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

She said the availability of more products with broad-spectrum protection was especially positive.



"It's the one thing that maybe a general person would not understand about," Eber said. "They hear about SPF and water resistance, but if someone just went aimlessly to pick sunscreen off a shelf, they'd probably end up with one with broad-spectrum coverage, and that's encouraging."

Alex Webb of Hillsborough, N.C., spends a lot of time outdoors. He hikes, hunts and fishes and works part-time for a construction company. Like many baby boomers, he had some bad sunburns as a kid, boosting his skin cancer risk. So he tries to be careful.

"When I'm out in the sun, I apply sunscreen, wear a brimmed hat and sunglasses," said Webb, 64. "I also have a couple of SPF long sleeve shirts of thin material for hot weather. I look for some shade and take an umbrella for the beach."

He's also extra careful at the shore, mindful that the reflection from water and sand "seems to make you burn quicker."

That's savvy strategy, according to Duke's Nicholas, who noted many people seem confused about sun protection. She suspects it's because there are so many different sunscreens -- from lotions to foams to sprays.

Her No. 1 recommendation: Look for a product containing zinc oxide.

The same ingredient in diaper creams, zinc oxide blocks both UVA and UVB rays, Nicholas said. For kids and adults who sweat or swim a lot, zinc oxide sticks are easy to use. Products containing titanium dioxide are also effective sunblockers, she added.

"If you choose zinc oxide 30 SPF or higher, it'd be pretty hard to go wrong. But I remind my patients that no sunscreen will work if you don't use it," Nicholas said.



And, she added, don't be stingy. Most people use too little product. A golf-ball-sized glob will provide head-to-toe coverage for most, and it should be reapplied every two hours — at least.

If you're swimming or sweating a lot, reapply every 40 to 80 minutes as directed on the label. Products designed for wet skin can be slathered on without toweling off, and different formulas have different feels, Nicholas said. Choose one that offers good protection and has a feel you like.

Be wary of so-called "natural" products with herbal ingredients, she advised, and compare product labels. Products marketed for infants often have ingredients identical to others but may cost more.

The safest strategy is also the cheapest.

"It's hard for people to hear this, but sometimes it's just best to seek shade in the middle of the day," Nicholas said. "In the summer, it's really challenging to completely protect yourself."

The study was published as a letter in the August issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*.

NEWBORN SKIN 101

Published by Johns Hopkins Medicine

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/newborn-skin-101>



Odd rashes, suspicious crusting and bumps that crop up from out of the blue are all common afflictions of newborn skin that rarely portend something ominous and are easy to treat. Yet, they have scared many first-time parents into calling their pediatrician after hours or rushing to the emergency room.

“Neonatal rashes tend to develop suddenly and have a dramatic appearance that can easily frighten a rookie parent, but luckily most of these are completely benign,” says Johns Hopkins Children’s Center dermatologist Kate Püttgen, M.D.

Offering her dual expertise as a mom and pediatric dermatologist, Püttgen discusses newborn skin care and the most common skin problems in newborns.

CRADLE CAP

What is it? Neonatal dandruff, also known as seborrheic dermatitis, is extremely common but the cause isn’t fully known. It tends to occur in areas rich in oil glands in the first three months of life.

How to treat? Most cases of cradle cap require nothing more than gentle washing and observation and clear up on its own. Petroleum jelly or olive oil can help relieve some of the crusting.

When to call the pediatrician? If crusting persists or gets worse over time, your pediatrician may prescribe an antifungal cream or shampoo.

DIAPER RASH

What is it? Skin irritation marked by red inflamed patches or bumps on baby’s buttocks and genital area. Fungal infections can cause diaper rash. Another common cause is skin inflammation caused by exposure to stool and urine. Harsh soaps, sweat, moisture or diapers that are too tight can also cause a rash or worsen an existing rash.

How to prevent and treat? Change diapers often and as soon as the baby urinates or has a bowel movement. Wash your hands before and after you do so. Always dry baby’s skin thoroughly. Applying petroleum jelly or zinc oxide-based cream with each diaper change can be helpful. Never use talcum powder. Avoid perfumed baby wipes or wipes that contain alcohol. Keep the diapers loose. An antifungal or mild corticosteroid cream used for short periods can speed up healing.

When to call the pediatrician? If the rash doesn’t get better within a few days, spreads further, becomes oozy or if your baby develops fever — a sign of infection — it’s time to see a doctor. A fungal infection should be suspected in all babies taking antibiotics, which can disrupt the balance between good and bad bacteria and cause yeast overgrowth.



ERYTHEMA TOXICUM

What is it? A benign condition that affects the majority of newborns in the first days and weeks of life. Hallmark signs of the condition are yellowish papules surrounded by red skin on the face and trunk, upper arms and thighs.

How to treat? Typically no treatment is needed. The rash will clear up on its own within a few weeks.

When to call the pediatrician? If your baby has signs of erythema toxicum, an exam can confirm the diagnosis and provide reassurance.

SKINCARE

The basic rules of neonatal skincare, Püttgen says, are “less is more” and “bland and simple.”

Less is more Babies don’t need an elaborate skin care regimen and barely any products. Keep bathing to a minimum to avoid stripping the skin of its protective natural oils. A bath twice or three times a week is sufficient.

Bland and simple Baby skin is highly absorbent so it’s critical to use fragrance-free, hypo-allergenic products. Avoid perfumes and dyes, which can seriously irritate newborn skin.

Extra-fragile preemie skin warrants special attention. Premature skin does not hold moisture well, which makes it thinner, drier and breakage-prone, Püttgen says. She recommends applying petroleum jelly daily to lock in moisture and strengthen the skin’s barrier function.

Sun protection Sun protection is another topic that causes a lot of confusion, Püttgen says. “Parents know that sun protection is critical, yet many are hesitant to use sunscreens,” she says.

Avoiding sun exposure is the best protection, Püttgen says. Use physical barriers like clothing, hats and stroller covers anytime you take baby outside. Sunscreens, though generally harmless, should be avoided when possible because the Food and Drug Administration has not studied their safety in infants under 6 months of age.

If sun exposure cannot be avoided, opt for fragrance-free, hypo-allergenic sunscreens that list zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide as active ingredients. Known as physical sunscreens, these two ingredients block UV rays. By contrast, chemical sunscreens with active ingredients like octylcylene, avobenzone, octinoxate, mexoryl and octisalate, tend to absorb and “disarm” UV rays before they can damage the skin.

THE MIND-SKIN-HEALTH CONNECTION

Published by Web MD

<https://www.webmd.com/beauty/features/mind-skin-health-connection>

Skin. It's where our inside meets the outside. A defense against the external world, but it's also a way to explore new sensations and to caress what we find desirable.

There's a connection between the mind and the skin, says Ted A. Grossbart, PhD, a psychologist at Harvard Medical School in Boston and author of *Skin Deep: A Mind/Body Program for Healthy Skin*.

HOW DO YOUR EMOTIONS REALLY SUIT YOU?

"All parts of the body react to our emotions, but the skin is the one suit we never take off. Because it's the border between the inside and the outside, it's full of all the intrigue and byplay that accompanies being on the border," says Grossbart.

Because mind and skin are intimately connected, Grossbart and others are encouraging people to use mind-body relaxation and stress-reduction methods in addition to conventional medicines when dealing with skin problems.

"Our bodies respond to an imagined situation as if it were real," Grossbart says. "If you picture yourself sitting by the fire, your toes actually get warmer. Since some skin conditions respond to external conditions, visualizing an image of dry sunlight or cool moisture may help your skin feel more comfortable."

"There does seem to be a relationship between the mind and the skin, though proving this scientifically can be quite difficult," says Derek H. Jones, MD, a dermatologist in private practice in Los Angeles and clinical assistant professor at the UCLA school of medicine. "It's well-known that when someone has psoriasis, stress tends to make the problem worse."

SOMETIMES, YOUR SKIN NEEDS YOU TO TAKE IT ON VACATION

When Jones trained at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City, people with a bad case of psoriasis were often admitted for two or three weeks of inpatient treatment.

"We gave them a variety of treatments, including topical and light therapies, and we saw rapid improvement," he says. "We did believe that taking them away from the stresses of their everyday lives was a definite factor in this improvement, though it's impossible to prove. Nowadays, insurance won't cover inpatient treatment for psoriasis."

"Eczema and psoriasis in particular are exquisitely sensitive to increases in stress," says Audrey Kunin, MD, a dermatologist with a special interest in cosmetic dermatology, who practices in Kansas City, Mo.

"It is so common for my patients to report when they leave town on some relaxing vacation, their psoriasis or eczema almost magically resolves. It is not uncommon for new patients to report they are 'allergic' to something in their environment,

when in fact they are responding to an increased level of stress in their environment," says Kunin.

People with cold sores often say they flare up when they're under stress. "The reason is that stress really does alter immune-system responses," Jones says. "The herpes virus responsible for cold sores is present all the time, but most of the time, the immune system has it controlled."

Acne flares are notorious before a big date or special event, Kunin says.

"This may have something to do with elevated cortisol levels," she says. "I encourage my acne patients to exercise regularly and try to keep stress down, especially when there is a planned event."


SHINGLES: BYPRODUCT OF AGING ... AND STRESS, TOO?

Shingles is a painful skin problem caused by the same virus that's responsible for chickenpox. The virus remains inactive in nerve root cells for many years, until something rouses it, causing inflammation of the nerve. The patient experiences pain and a rash with small blisters in a narrow band on one side of the body.

"While it has long been suggested that stress may aggravate this condition, I have not found it to be true in the real world," Kunin says. "The dermatology community now feels that as people live longer, the majority of adults will eventually experience a bout of shingles. This is normally a one-time event. You can get it again in a different part of the body, but most people aren't that unlucky."

Kunin routinely treats shingles with oral antiviral agents to reduce the risk of postherpetic neuralgia, a painful condition that sometimes remains after the rash goes away.





"Grossbart, however, says he believes stress can tip the balance between the virus and immune system and lead to an outbreak of shingles.

"We know the immune system is exquisitely sensitive to a range of emotional issues. We know the shingles virus lives in the body for decades. Why is it activated at a particular time? Because the person is under stress," he says.

Grossbart has found that hypnosis is particularly effective in dealing with pain control if pain persists even when the rash has disappeared.

FEEL EMOTIONS IN YOUR HEART

In many cases, skin problems may be intimately linked with emotional issues the person is dealing with.

"Skin symptoms like other symptoms are often well-intentioned but doomed attempts to make our lives better," says Grossbart. "They are doomed because we're trying to use our skin to do things the skin is not designed for. I tell my patients, 'try to feel your emotions in your heart, not in your skin.'"

For example, Grossbart recalls one patient who was caring for a difficult baby, with little help.

"She developed a rash on her hand, on her ring finger, and it was so severe her wedding ring had to be cut off," he says. "Meanwhile, she was wearing similar rings on other fingers with no problem. This is a kind of body poetry, a physical metaphor."

One way to deal with stress is to use mind-body techniques, forming mental images of a safe, nurturing environment. Hypnosis and self-hypnosis can be effective too, Grossbart says.

"But when you're dealing with stress, the problem may not be the stressful situation, as much as the effort to avoid that situation and the feelings it arouses," he says.

Grossbart urges patients to use focused psychotherapy to explore and deal more effectively with situations that trigger skin symptoms.

"When you look at what's going on underneath, most often we find unacknowledged anger. Next, we often find people crying out for more love and caring." How, and whether, to express these emotions will depend on each person's particular situation. "The first thing is to feel what you feel. Experience your emotions and don't kid yourself," Grossbart says.



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