

Safety in the Sun

Information and advice for patients

Dermatology

Why have I been given this leaflet?

You may be at risk of skin cancer lesions due to the medication that you are commencing or because your skin has shown the tendency to develop skin cancer lesions already. Following this advice may help you reduce your risk of this happening to you. For more information please use the contact details at the end of this leaflet.

Be sensible and enjoy the sun

Most skin cancers are caused by over-exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun or sunbeds. Don't let sunburn catch you out.

Aim to strike a balance between protecting yourself from the sun and getting enough vitamin D from sunlight. (For further reading visit <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-get-vitamin-d-from-sunlight>)

Sun Safety Tips

- **Avoid the midday sun**

Between 11am to 3pm in England, when abroad follow the local midday sun times. This is when the sun is at its highest and the ultra-violet radiation rays are most intense from March to October.

Cover up don't rely on sun cream alone to protect yourself from the sun.

- **Wear a shirt**

Our bodies have insufficient protection against the sun so it is advisable to wear loose fitting close woven shirts. Hold your shirt up to the light - this will show you how much it is letting through the weave.

You will then know how much protection it is giving you from the sun.

- **Wear a wide brimmed hat**

Wear a wide brimmed hat, made of close woven material, to shade your scalp, ears, nose, neck and face.

- **Wear sun glasses**

Sun glasses protect your eyes; look for the British Standard quality mark when buying new sun glasses.

- **Sit in the shade**

Sit in the shade; though always continue with the protection measures discussed in the leaflet as the sun rays "bounce off" walls and the ground - you can be "burnt" in the shade.

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- **Applying Sun cream**

Apply sun cream/ lotion minimum of 20 minutes prior to going outdoors for the cream to be effective, put on after moisturiser and allow 20 minutes before applying make-up, insect repellent etc. and re-apply.

Apply Sun Cream every 2 hours or more frequently if washed, rubbed or sweated off.

What should I look for in a sun cream / lotion?

Choose one:

- That protects you from UVB and UVA. With a SPF of at least 30 (this will protect you from the UVB).

The higher the SPF the better the protection.

- With a UVA star rating of at least 4 or 5 (this will protect you from UVA).
- UVA protection can be indicated by this symbol UVA, which indicates it meets EU standards.

The higher the star rating the better the protection.

- That is water-resistant, as it is less likely to wash or be sweated off.
- With a valid "use by" date (most lotions/ creams have a shelf life of 2-3 years).
- Don't store sun creams in very hot places as extreme heat can ruin the protective chemicals.
- Be aware you can over expose to sun light in everyday life such as driving a car, outdoor hobbies such as gardening, fishing, and hiking.

How to apply sun cream / lotions

A guide to applying sun cream for an adult is as follows:

- Use around 2 teaspoons of sun cream / lotion if you're just covering your head, neck ears and arms.
- Use around 2 table spoons if you're covering your entire body.

Swimming outdoors

A light weight t-shirt that does not become transparent in water should be worn in addition to a water-resistant broad spectrum sun protection lotion/cream, as ultra-violet radiation penetrates water.

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Babies

Never leave babies in direct sunlight. Protect babies by keeping them in the shade, dress them in loose-fitting, close-woven clothes and sun hats, and use a broad spectrum sun lotion / cream SPF30 with a UVA star rating 4-5.

Children

Children should be protected by wearing close-woven shirts and sun hats, sun glasses and the frequent use of a broad spectrum lotion/cream on exposed skin.

Are there different types of sun creams?

There are 2 different types of sun cream, Chemical and Mineral and they shield your skin from the harmful effects of the sun's UV rays in very different ways.

Mineral sun creams sit on the skin's surface and physically prevent UV rays from penetrating the skin.

Chemical sun creams allow UV light into the skin. Once the light is absorbed into the skin, the chemicals create a chemical reaction in which UV light is converted to heat, and the heat disperses from the skin.

Neither one of these is better than the other, it is down to own individual preference.

Information and advice for patients on using Sunbeds

Sunbeds produce harmful ultra-violet radiation rays, which damage the DNA in our skin cells and can cause skin cancer. They are not a safe alternative to tanning outdoors.

In 2009 Cancer Research UK suggested that they had estimated that sunbeds caused around 100 deaths from Melanoma every year in the UK. They also suggested the more you use a sunbed the greater your risk of skin cancer and that using a sun bed once a month or more increases the risk of skin cancer by more than half. Sunbeds also cause premature skin ageing. Which means your skin becomes coarse, leathery and wrinkled at a young age.

Sunbeds do not protect you from sunburn so always use a broad spectrum sun cream/lotion of at least SPF30 with a 4/5 star rating to protect you from UVA.

Are fake tans OK?

Yes - as far as we know there is no harm in a tan that comes out of a bottle! But they do not protect you from skin damage or skin cancer. Use of tanning lamps or sunbeds is not safe – it is likely to increase your risk of skin cancer.

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Self-examination

You should check your moles once a month remembering to check the soles of your feet and in-between the toes and either let your partner check your back or use a mirror. If you notice any changes go to your GP.

Changes to look for with moles

- A. Asymmetry** the two halves of the mole don't look the same
- B. Border** the edges of the mole are rugged or uneven
- C. Colour** if a mole has multiple colours or the colour changes.
- D. Diameter** Pay attention to mole larger than the end of a pencil (6mm).
- E. Evolution** A change in an existing mole or a new lesion evolving from the skin (particularly if you are over the age of 35)

See your GP and have it checked.

Early detection of skin cancer

It is very important to detect skin cancer early, as the majority of early skin cancers can be cured by simply removing them. Remember sun burn and skin damage in childhood can cause serious problems in later adult life.

Therefore, we hope it makes sense to know why you should protect yourself and your children and how important early diagnosis is.

Contact details

Anne Rutland

Skin Cancer Nurse Specialist

Birmingham skin Centre

City Hospital

Dudley Road

Birmingham

B18 7QH

Email arutland@nhs.net

Telephone 0121 507 4493

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Dermatology

The Courtyard Centre

Cancer Information & Support Centre

Sandwell General Hospital

Lyndon

West Bromwich

B71 4H

Phone number: 0121 507 3792

For more advice on sun safety or support information contact
0808 808 0000 or if you just want someone to talk to. (7 days a week, 8am to 8 pm) or visit
www.macmillan.org.uk

Information on medication visit <https://www.bad.org.uk/patient-information-leaflets>

Sources used for information

Advise others how to protect themselves

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