Western Cape Government
Education
FOR YOU

How to keep safe in the sun

Cases of cutaneous melanoma are expected to increase by 50% between 2020 and 2040, according to a study by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). However, experts believe that four out of five cases can be avoided, as long as we protect ourselves properly from the sun.

Are you at risk of developing skin cancer?

These are the biggest risk factors:

- Having fair skin, especially if you have red hair, moles or skin spots
- Playing a lot of outdoor sports
- Living in sunny climates
- Regularly working outside
- Regularly spending time driving
- Having a personal or family history of skin cancer

If any of these apply to you, examine your whole body regularly - ask a loved one to check areas that you can't see, such as your back or the backs of your legs. You should also speak to a dermatologist about regular screenings to prevent skin cancer.

When do you need to use sun protection?

You should protect your skin from the sun every day, regardless of the weather. You can still be exposed to UV rays when it's cloudy, cold, rainy or windy.

What does 'SPF' mean?

SPF stands for Sun Protection Factor. "Manufacturers calculate SPF based on how long it takes to sunburn skin treated with sunscreen, as compared to skin with no sunscreen," says dermatologist Dr Lawrence E. Gibson of the Mayo Clinic. In other words, if you choose a good quality SPF30, it would take about 30 times longer to burn than if you weren't wearing sunscreen. Note that you need to use it correctly and in the recommended dose.

Do people of colour need sun protection?

It's true that people with fair skin experience sunburn faster than those who have darker skin tones, because the naturally higher levels of melanin in darker skin help to protect them against sun damage. However, melanoma can happen to anyone, regardless of race or ethnicity, so people of colour should practice sun protection, too.

What should your sunscreen offer?

1. It needs to protect against UVA and UVB rays, as well as visible light and infrared radiation (contained in everyday sunlight).
2. It needs to be at least SPF30 to ensure adequate protection.
3. It needs to protect against pollution and free radicals.

General rules for protecting your skin

- Speak to your doctor or pharmacist to determine whether any of your medications increase your skin's sensitivity to sunlight. If they do, you need to be extra cautious in the sun.
- Stay out of the sun between 11am and 3pm, when the sun's rays are the strongest. Cloudy conditions don't screen out the rays that can burn your skin.
- Wear light, long-sleeved clothing if you need to be outside for longer periods during the day.
- You need to reapply sunscreen regularly throughout the day if you're going to be outside. Opt for a light spray if you prefer not to constantly rub your skin.
- Children, especially, need adequate protection from the sun, because exposure during childhood is a significant risk factor for melanoma later in life.

www.nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/how-choose-best-sunscreen-according-these-dermatologists-ncna1002451 | https://acsjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.3322/caac.21660
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