



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

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Sunburn

Though many people believe a dark tan is healthy and beautiful, sunlight can damage skin and lead to skin lesions. There are 3 major negative effects from excessive, prolonged exposure to UV radiation. The first is premature aging and excessive drying, thinning and wrinkling of the skin. The second and more serious problem is skin cancer. Of the one million Americans per year that develop cancer, over one half of these patients suffer from skin cancer associated with over-exposure to UV light. The third problem is sunburn. The best treatment for sunburn is prevention. However, if you do experience sunburn, the following may help give some symptomatic relief.

1. Cold compresses, cool showers or baths provide symptomatic relief by creating a cooling vasoconstriction that helps to reduce redness and the burning sensation. Repeat 3-4 times a day.
2. Apply Corticosteroid lotions or sprays (i.e. Cortaid lotion and other over-the-counter hydrocortisone preparations) after a cold compress or cool shower to further reduce redness and burning. Caution - AVOID creams and ointments which retain heat and may make you more uncomfortable.
3. Take Ibuprofen or Tylenol every 4-6 hours with a full glass of water for the first 24-72 hours to reduce pain.
4. Drink at least 2 quarts of water daily to prevent dehydration.
5. Avoid sun exposure to burned areas for at least 3-4 weeks to allow for complete healing and recovery.

Infection seldom occurs with sunburn. If crusting and pus formation occur, see a health practitioner.

Helpful over-the-counter products:

- Aloe Vera Gel (Sundance)
- Aveeno Bath Powder or oatmeal soap
- Solarcaine
- Solarcaine Aloe Extra Cream or Gel

Adverse effects of exposure to solar irradiation may be prevented with sunscreens.

- Use a sunscreen with a SPF between 15 and 30
- Apply sunscreen 15 minutes before sun exposure and reapply after sweating and swimming.

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