

SENSE IN THE SUN

The bronzed Aussie image has been a tradition for many Australians. This is now changing and a tan is becoming far less desirable.

The natural pigment in the skin, melanin, offers some protection from the sun's damaging rays, but for most people it is not enough.

RISKS

If you spend time in the sun you risk:

- **Sunburn** – may cause permanent skin damage.
- **Premature ageing** – wrinkles, coarse leathery skin, sunspots.
- **Skin cancer** – Australia has the highest incidence of skin cancer in the world.

CHECK LIST

All Australians are at risk of permanent skin damage and skin cancer but the risk is higher if you:

- Get sunburnt
- Have spent a lot of your life outdoors, unprotected
- Have fair skin (see Sunscreen Fact Card).
- Live in the north of Australia.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Skin Cancer

Watch out for and have your practitioner check:

- Any unusual skin condition that doesn't heal in four weeks – including any lump, sore, ulcer or scaly patch on the skin, or white patch on the lips.
- A freckle, mole or spot which appears or changes over a period of months.
- An unusual freckle, mole or spot – look for irregular shape, uneven surface, colour change, in freckle, mole or skin around them.

IMPORTANT

- Early skin cancers can be cured in 99.9% of cases.
- Skin cancer is much more often seen than felt (skin cancers rarely hurt).
- Don't hesitate to ask your doctor – the more trivial the condition, the easier it will be to treat.

SELF MANAGEMENT

Sunburn

- Stay out of the sun for the next two to three days.
- Apply a cool washer or have a cool shower.
- Drink plenty of liquid. Watch for signs of dehydration, especially with children. Ask your pharmacist.
- Apply a preparation to relieve the discomfort of sunburn – ask your pharmacist.
- Take a pain reliever eg. aspirin (**for adults only**) or paracetamol – ask your pharmacist.
- For further relief after the skin has lost its heat, apply a moisturiser.

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

Be aware of the skin facts:

- Different people have different levels of melanin (the pigment in the skin). The average Australian has enough melanin to give 12 minutes protection.
- Skin which has not been exposed to the sun burns more easily – eg. babies, genitals.
- Exposed areas are more likely to get burnt and are the most common sites for skin cancers, eg. bald heads, noses, tips of the ears, shoulders, hands.

Be aware of the sun facts:

- The danger hours for exposure to sun are 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. (11:00 A.M. to 3 P.M. daylight saving time).
- The amount of skin exposure in childhood is related to skin cancer in adults.
- Clouds may screen out the heat but not the skin damaging rays.
- White surfaces (eg. cement, sand, snow, rippling water) reflect damaging rays. An umbrella is not a complete shade.
- Sun penetrates water and still burns while you swim.

- The wind may be cooling but the sun still burns the skin.
- The higher the altitude the more intense the skin damaging rays, eg. skiing in the mountains.
- Some medicines and cosmetics can cause an adverse reaction when skin is exposed to sunlight. Ask your pharmacist.
- A few minutes of sunlight a day provides all the Vitamin D you need.

NEW HABITS

- **Slip** on a shirt – if you have fair skin also wear a shirt while swimming.
- **Slop** on properly a SPF15 sunscreen. (See Sunscreen Fact Card).
- **Slap** on a hat – wear a wide brimmed hat whenever you go out in the sun for work or play, and remember – your children learn from your example.
- **Slide** on a pair of sunglasses.
- Put on your sunscreen before you or your children go outside and before the children go to school.
- Carry a spare bottle of sunscreen in your sports bag, work bag, in a cool place in the car or in baby's nappy bag.
- Plan family outdoor activities to suit the child with the most sensitive skin.
- In summer, encourage indoor activities during the danger hours.

- Drink at least 2-3 litres of water a day.
- Have your general practitioner check your skin for sun damage annually.

RESIST

- Ignoring warning signs.
- Outdoor activities during the danger hours.

ENJOY

- Limited time in the sun.
- Fewer freckles and moles.
- Young looking skin.
- Summer free of painful sunburn.
- No longer having to tan.

Recommended Reading:

MARKS R.
The Sun and Your Skin
Macdonald Optima, 1988.

BERGER P.
Skin Secrets
Allen & Unwin 1991.

Contact:

Your general practitioner (listed under Medical Practitioners in the yellow pages of the telephone directory).

The anti-cancer body in your State:

ACT: (06) 285 3070
NSW: (02) 267 1944
Qld: (07) 257 1155
SA: (08) 267 5222
Tas: (002) 312 990
Vic: (03) 662 3300
WA: (09) 321 6224

Your **Self Care** pharmacist.

To locate:

ACT: (06) 281 1366
NSW: (02) 437 5941
Qld: (07) 844 4900
SA: (08) 272 1211
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