

SUN SAFETY

Now that summer is upon us we are hopefully enjoying more time outdoors. When children are outdoors, it is important to protect them from the sun. Damaged skin and even cancer can occur from too much sun exposure. Because the effects of sun damage can take years to accumulate, it is important to begin steps to safeguard the skin as early as possible. Below are some helpful guidelines to follow to help shield skin and prevent painful sunburns.

What causes sunburn?

Sunburns and even tans are the result of too much contact with the sun. When a sunburn or tan fades, the harm caused to skin does not lessen. Once the sun damages skin, the damage can never be reversed.

How serious is sun exposure?

Just a couple of significant sunburns can increase your child's risk of skin cancer later in life. Kids don't have to be at the beach to get too much sun, exposure happens when you are doing anything outside, even walking. All children need some degree of shelter from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays whenever they're outdoors.

How can I minimize sun damage to my child?

Sun protection should start at an early age. Because babies have thinner skin, their skin can burn more easily. The best defense for babies less than 6 months of age is shade, in fact, all children and adults alike should stay in the shade as much as possible. Children should wear hats and long sleeve shirts (if they are not too uncomfortable with the heat). The peak time for sunlight is between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. which is when the sun's rays are the most harmful. Outdoor activities should be limited as much as possible during these hours. Always use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with at least SPF 30 on any exposed skin. Allow the sunscreen to dry before going swimming and remember to re-apply at least every two hours or as recommended. When applying sunscreen to your children, use liberal amounts. One ounce (approximately the same amount it takes to fill a shot glass) is the proper amount to use.

What can I do if my child gets sunburn?

When people get sunburned they experience pain and a feeling of heat. These symptoms typically tend to get worse for many hours after sun exposure. Sunburned skin begins to peel about a week after the sunburn. Encourage your child not to scratch or peel off loose skin because skin underneath the sunburn is at risk for infection.

How do I treat my child's sunburn?

Have your child take a cool (not cold) bath. You can gently apply cool compresses to the skin to help with the pain and heat. You can apply moisturizing cream to rehydrate the skin and treat itching from peeling. Do not use petroleum-based products, because they can hold the heat inside rather than allowing it to escape. If the sunburn is severe and blisters develop, call your doctor. Tell your child not to scratch, pop, or squeeze the blisters, as this can cause infection and scarring. Stay out of the sun until the sunburn is healed as any further sun exposure will only make the burn worse and increase pain.

Another less known fact is that exposure to the sun can also cause damage to eyes. The easiest way to protect eyes is to wear sunglasses that provide 100% UV protection. Even a small amount of sun can burn a cornea and with sun exposure over time, cataracts can develop. Another important consideration is that some medicines make skin more sensitive to UV rays. Before starting a new medication, ask your doctor or pharmacist if it can increase sun sensitivity.

Lastly, don't forget to protect ears, noses, lips, and the tops of feet. Take sunscreen with you to reapply during the day, especially after swimming and water activities. Always follow the directions on the sunscreen product. Above all, try to be a good role model by always using sunscreen, wearing sunglasses, and limiting your time in the sun. You'll reduce your risk of sun damage, including wrinkles and sun spots, and teach your children some good sun sense.