

**CHILDREN'S CLOTHING**

**Sun Protection**

Remember how much a blistering sunburn hurt as a child? Medical experts believe that too much exposure to the sun early on is a major cause of skin cancer and premature aging.

But regular sun exposure throughout the year also contributes to long-term skin damage. Tanning, for example, is a sign of skin damage. Even children with darker complexions, who have more natural protection against the sun, are at risk.

Two kinds of ultraviolet sun rays, UVA and UVB, can cause skin damage. This damage can range from immediate effects such as burning, photosensitive reactions (such as rashes), or cell and tissue damage to long-term consequences such as wrinkling and skin cancer. Experts believe that UVA also may weaken the immune system.

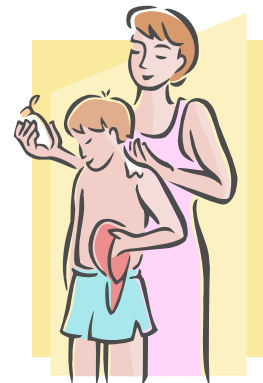
You can help protect your child's skin from damage by taking the right steps early.

**Use Sunscreens**

Using sunscreens is important. Many dermatologists believe children and teenagers who regularly use sunscreens can significantly reduce the risk of skin damage, including skin cancer, later in life.

To help protect children:

- ❖ Use waterproof or water resistant sunscreens that help to protect skin from both UVA and UVB rays and have SPF (sun protection factor) numbers of at least 15.
- ❖ Don't forget the lips, apply lip balm that has at least SPF 15 also.
- ❖ For maximum absorption, apply sunscreen liberally (at least one large handful for a body) about 30 minutes before going outside. No matter what sunscreen product is used, be sure it is reapplied after swimming or perspiring heavily.
- ❖ Talk to camp counselors and others with child care responsibilities about reapplying sunscreens. Toweling off after swimming for example, will remove even waterproof sunscreens.



Know that no sunscreen totally blocks the sun's rays. Even children wearing high SPF sunscreens get some exposure to ultraviolet rays.

## UV Protective Clothing

In addition to using a sunscreen, wearing the right clothing will increase your child's protection from harmful rays. A day at the ball field or park should include a hat that shades the neck, ears, and face. The sun's ultraviolet radiation, both UVA and UVB, can shine through some clothing. Even without visible sunburn, these harmful rays may contribute to the possible development of skin cancer. Since previous sun damage affects the deeper layers of the skin, these added rays can add to the cumulative damage.

Research done at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia found that a white cotton t-shirt only provides the same protection as applying a sunscreen with SPF 5. If the shirt is wet, it loses another third of its already inadequate protection. Add to that the reflection from sand and water at the beach and harmful exposure almost doubles!

The American Cancer Society recommends the following tips to get the most protection from your children's clothes:

- ❖ Choose 100 percent polyester items for a day in the sun.
- ❖ Wear dark clothing instead of white. Dark colors provide five times more protection than white because the dye absorbs UV rays.
- ❖ Choose clothes of tightly woven fabrics. Check the weave by seeing how much light comes through the fabric when held up to a window or light.
- ❖ Put on dry clothes or cover up after swimming.
- ❖ Consider using a laundry additive now available that gives clothing a sun protection factor of 15, which is supposed to last as long as the clothes.

Sun-blocking clothes are now available through catalogs and sporting goods stores. Look for labels that display UPF of 15 (Ultraviolet Protective Factor) for minimum protection. Just like SPF, a higher number will provide greater protection.

## Other Important Information

To help protect children from the sun, remember the following:

- ❖ The sun is strongest from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Schedule children's outdoor activities accordingly.
- ❖ Dress children for maximum protection against the sun. Hats with 3 to 4 inch brims all the way around and tight-weave, long-sleeved shirts and pants offer the best protection. Baseball style caps, while having brims, do not protect the ears and neck.
- ❖ Sunglasses can help protect children's eyes. Select sunglasses that help to screen out both UVA and UVB rays. UV rays may contribute to the development of cataracts. Sunglasses that are close-fitting to the face and with larger lenses also can give more protection. Teenagers who work outside in such jobs as lifeguards, gardeners, or construction workers may be at special risk for skin damage because their cells are dividing and changing more rapidly than those of adults. They need adequate protection before going out in the sun.



- ❖ Discourage teenagers from going to tanning parlors. Tanning devices can damage the skin and eyes as much as direct sunlight.
- ❖ Keep babies younger than 6 months of age out of the sun. Know that sunscreens may irritate baby skin, and an infant's developing eyes are especially vulnerable to sunlight.

### **What You Should Know About Skin Cancer**

Medical experts believe that the sun causes most skin cancer, which is the most common form of cancer in this country. An increasingly higher number of young people now are being diagnosed with it.

Two types of skin cancer, basal cell and squamous cell, will develop this year in more than a million Americans. If detected early, these cancers are usually treatable.

The third kind of cancer, melanoma, if not caught early can result in death. The number of new cases is increasing faster than any form of cancer. Pediatric melanoma cases have increased more than a 100 percent over the past 20 years. Early detection is crucial for successful treatment.

Several factors are associated with increased risk of developing skin cancer. These include having:

- ❖ Several blistering sunburns as a child or teenager
- ❖ A family history of skin cancer
- ❖ Light-colored skin, hair, and eyes
- ❖ Difficulty tanning or frequent sunburns
- ❖ Moles that: are irregular in shape or color; change in size, shape, or color; itch; or bleed.

### **For more information**

Be sure to check with your family doctor or dermatologist if you have questions or concerns about skin cancer or skin damage.

Sources:

American Cancer Society and the Skin Cancer Foundation

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