



# Be Sun Smart

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There is a legitimate concern over sun exposure due to increased risks of skin cancer. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the US and accounts for approximately 1% of all cancer deaths. Research has established a link between cancer & excessive sun exposure, particularly incidences of bad sun burning when young. There are other good reasons to avoid excessive sun exposure other than avoidance of cancer. *Wrinkles, premature aging, retinal problems, and cataracts* may all be associated with overexposure to the sun. Research has shown that this aging effect is multiplied when the individual also smokes cigarettes. It is the ultraviolet or UV in sunlight that is the damaging portion of the sunlight. UV has two major components UVA and UVB. Of course, merely exposure to the sun is not the entire story. The effects are dependent on you, your level of pigmentation, how much of a tan you already have as well as the nature of your skin. Production of your skin's pigment, or melanin, is stimulated by sun exposure and does reduce your risk of sunburn. Please aware that even tan or dark skinned individuals can be sunburned and damage their skin with over exposure. *Remember it is not the temperature outside that tans you; it is the intensity of the rays.* Don't think you can't be burned if it is cool out. As skiers we are aware that one can even get sunburned in the wintertime and get a lovely 'raccoon look'. Some drugs increase your susceptibility.

**Location** is very important for sun exposure, high elevation and being near the water or reflective surfaces can greatly augment the amount of UV you are exposed to. Clouds do decrease the amount of sun exposure, but UV is still transmitted, and many people end up with a burn despite overcast skies.

**Altitude** greatly affects the amounts of UV exposure. Higher elevation= more exposure.

**Time** of day and of year also influences the amount of exposure. The maximum intensity is at the Summer Solstice (typically about June 21). Therefore exposure say on April 30 is roughly equivalent to exposure on August 11 (obtained by counting days from the solstice). The maximum exposure is usually at noon, the further from this time, the weaker the rays. Generally 10 am until 2pm is the strongest interval of UV rays.

**Obstruction** Clearly one obvious way to not get too much sun is to use protective devices like clothing, hats, umbrellas, sunglasses, etc. Make sure your sunglasses block both UVA and UVB also. Wrap around and larger glasses give your eyes even more protection

**Lotion** Suntan products are rated by *Sun Protection Factor or SPF*. The SPF is supposed to be an indicator as to how much protection there is. For example a sunscreen with a SPF of 10 is purportedly giving you protection such that 10 hours of sun will only give you 1 hour worth of exposure. Be very cautious when using this logic. Just be aware that the higher the SPF the more protection. Most dermatologists are now recommending SPF 15. While there are higher SPFs some have questioned whether you get much more protection than with 15. Also remember that rubbing, sweating and swimming all wash off sunscreen, even if it is waterproof. Also if you use waterproof sunscreen, apply it at least 20 minutes before swimming and don't forget to reapply this at intervals of every 60-80 minutes. Make sure the lotion states on it that it is effective against block UVA and UVB. Use high SPF sunscreen on the back of your hands, why let them get wrinkled and old looking. Also individuals who get oral herpes or cold sores should be cognizant that UV stimulates these episodes you may want to use high SPF lotion in these areas.

**Sunburn** Ouch! Try aloe with benzocaine; take a cool bath with Aveeno (oatmeal extract) or baking soda. Some folks recommend vinegar, or tea. See what works, but remember, it's like a hangover, completely preventable with a little common sense.

Remember: Take care of your skin; it reflects your age and health. There is nothing wrong with getting tan, but remember that moderation is important; you'll have that skin the rest of your life.