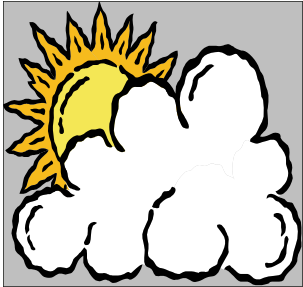


What Causes Sunburn?

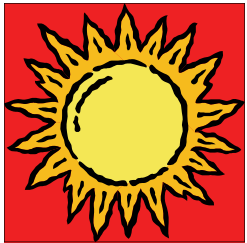
Sunburn results when the amount of exposure to the sun or other ultraviolet light source exceeds the ability of the body's protective pigment, *melanin*, to protect the skin. Other ultraviolet sources can be from sunlamps, tanning beds, or even from some workplace light sources (i.e. welding arcs). You can be sunburned on a cloudy or overcast day as well as a clear sunny day.



The risk for sunburn is increased for persons with fair-skin, blue eyes and red or blond hair. Persons taking some medications including sulfa drugs, tetracyclines, some diuretics, *Retin-A* and even *Benadryl* are at risk. Persons exposed to excessive outdoor sunlight, industrial UV light sources are also in a high risk group.

SUNBURNED?

Unlike a thermal burn, you may not be aware that you have a sunburn immediately. By the time the skin starts to become painful and red the damage has been done. Sunburn in a very light-skinned person may occur in less than 15 minutes of noonday sun exposure, while a dark-skinned person may tolerate the same exposure for hours.



The pain is worst between 6-48 hours after sun exposure. In severe sunburns, the skin may become blistered. There may be swelling (edema) of the skin with the legs being the most common areas. Toxins are released with sunburn and fever is not uncommon. The skin starts to peel between 3 and 8 days after exposure.

CONSEQUENCES OF SUNBURNS

The **long-term consequences of years of overexposure to the sun are significant.** It is now recognized that sunburn and sun exposure should not be taken as something insignificant.

Deaths have resulted from acute sun-poisoning and significant temporary disability is experienced by millions of sunburned people each year. One blistering sunburn doubles the likelihood of developing ***malignant melanoma***.

Chronic sun exposure causes premature wrinkling and aging of the skin. Age spots (*lentigo*) are a result of sun exposure. Skin cancer (***basil cell and squamous cell cancer***) is directly related to the amount of sun exposure which is determined by skin pigmentation and hours in the sun.

Sun exposure and ultraviolet damage have been implicated in the development of cataracts.

One blistering sunburn doubles the likelihood of developing malignant melanoma.

HEALTHY EXPOSURE TO THE SUN

Sunburn is better prevented than treated.

Very effective sunscreens have been developed that protect from UVA and UVB (long and short wavelengths of ultraviolet light), which are the components of sunlight responsible for burning and cancerous changes in the skin.

Wearing a sunscreen with high sun protection factor (SPF) is recommended. The higher SPF numbers indicate greater protection. The lighter your skin tone, the higher the SPF should be. Most doctors recommend a sunscreen SPF level of 30 or greater. Sunscreen should be generously applied 15-30 minutes before sun exposure, and re-applied every hour and after swimming.

Make-up is now available with suncreening protection. Sunscreen, protective clothing, and ultraviolet-protected sunglasses are all recommended to prevent excessive sun exposure. Dress smart. Wear muted colors such as tan. **Brilliant colors and white reflect sun onto the face.** Wear a hat when in the sun.

SUNBURN TREATMENT

- Cool the burn. Sponge the burn with moistened cloths or take a cool bath or shower. Do not use ice cold, but *cool water*.
- Do not use bath salts, oil or bubble bath.
- Do not scrub your skin or shave your skin.
- Use a soft towel and *gently pat* your skin dry.
- Use a sunburn Over-The-Counter remedy containing aloe vera. Use a light moisturizer or a dusting of powder to relieve chafing.
- **Avoid perfumes or scented items.**
- Use Over-the-counter analgesics to relieve the pain and headache and reduce the fever.
- Use an OTC topical steroid cream such as *Cortaid* if the pain persists. Don't use local anesthetic creams or sprays that numb pain such as *Benzocaine*. They can cause allergic reactions in some people.
- Rest in a comfortable position, in a cool, quiet room. Stay out of the sun.
- Drink plenty of water.

Sunburn victims should seek medical care:

- **if they have a fever of 102° F. or higher**
- **have nausea and vomiting**
- **are dizzy**
- **or have severe pain or blistering.**

Be sun smart—NEXT TIME!

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UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES
SAINT LIAM HALL
574-631-7497



Available 24/7 during the Academic Year

SUNBURN

“You should never get sunburned.”



It is not healthy, and it leads to premature aging, wrinkling of the skin and can cause skin cancer.

SUNBURN is color-blind when it comes to it's victims. Although darker skin may protect you from short exposures to ultraviolet light, all skin tones can burn

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