

## Let's Talk About...

# Sunburn and sun exposure to the eyes

Sunburns are caused by too much ultraviolet (UV) light on the skin from the sun or a sunlamp. This invisible radiation harms skin and eyes, even on a cloudy day. Years of exposure to UV light can also increase the risk of permanent eye damage, often cataracts (cloudy lenses in the eyes) later in life.

Although skin cancer happens in adults, getting suntans and sunburns in childhood can cause skin cancer later. The best way to prevent skin cancer is to prevent sunburn, especially during your child's first 10 years of life.

## What should I know about sun damage?

There are many myths about sun damage and skin cancer. Here's what you need to know:

- UV rays from the sun or sunlamps can damage any type of skin and all types and colors of eyes.
- While people with darker skin are less sensitive to the sun, everyone can get a sunburn or other problems caused by sunburn.
- Tanning is a sign that the sun has harmed the skin. There is no such thing as a "good" tan.
- Minor sunburns, which turn the skin pink or red, are first-degree burns.
- Too much exposure to the sun can cause blistering and a second-degree burn.
- Repeated suntans and burns can cause skin cancer and early skin aging, such as wrinkling, sagging, and brown sunspots.
- The sun can still harm your child's skin even if they don't get sunburned.
- The harmful effects of sun on the skin build up over years.

## How can I prevent skin cancer and damage to the eyes?

Here are some ways to prevent too much sun exposure:

- 1 Have your child find shade under trees and umbrellas, even after applying sunscreen.
- 2 Keep your child out of the sun between 10 AM–4 PM, when the sun's rays are strongest. Try to schedule outdoor activities before or after this time.

- 3 Dress your child in tightly woven cotton clothing with long sleeves and long pants. They should also wear a hat with a wide (4-inch) brim.
- 4 Be especially careful around water, snow, and sand, or at high elevations (such as ski resorts), because these areas increase the sun's exposure. The shade from a hat or umbrella will not protect your family from reflected rays, and you and your child can quickly become sunburned when hiking in the mountains.
- 5 Protect your child's eyes by having them wear sunglasses with UV protection.
- 6 Use sunscreen and reapply it often (see sunscreen section below).

## What kind of sunscreen should I use?

You should use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher anytime you or your child are outside for more than 15 minutes. The SPF filters the amount of sun that gets through to the skin.

### To use sunscreen correctly:

- Apply it everywhere, including your child's nose, lips, ears, cheeks, neck, shoulders, feet (if not wearing shoes), and even the back of their knees.
- Put it on at least 30 minutes before your child goes outside to give the sunscreen time to protect the skin.
- Reapply sunscreen every 3–4 hours or sooner if your child is swimming or sweating a lot (waterproof sunscreen only lasts 30 minutes in water).

You should also wear sunscreen whenever you go outside to set a good example for your child and protect your skin. Remember: You and your child can still get sunburned even after applying sunscreen.

## How can I protect my baby while in the sun?

To protect your baby while in the sun:

- Test each new sunscreen on your baby's wrist before applying it, because manufacturers do not test sunscreens on babies. If your baby has a skin reaction or begins crying, try a different sunscreen or ask your child's healthcare provider for advice.
- Have them wear a hat with a wide brim, child-sized sunglasses, sunscreen and loose, long-sleeved clothing.
- Keep a canopy on their stroller or use an umbrella for shade.
- Make sure they're drinking every 3 hours and making a normal amount of wet diapers. Babies are more likely to become dehydrated (not have enough fluid in the body) in the sun because they can't regulate their own body temperature.

Remember: Babies younger than 6 months old have thinner skin that is more sensitive to the sun. Sunburns hurt and can also cause fever and dehydration.

## What kind of sunglasses should my child use?

Choosing sunglasses is as important as sunscreen. Your child's sunglasses should:

- Cover their eyes and some of the surrounding area.
- Have a label that says they block at least 99% of both UVA and UVB radiation.
- Meet American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standards.

If your child is taking medicine, ask their healthcare provider about possible sun reactions, which can include rash, redness, and swelling.

## How can I help if my child gets a sunburn?

If your child gets sunburned:

- Add 2–3 tablespoons of baking soda to a cool bath and have them soak several times a day.
- Try applying cool compresses several times a day.
- Give them ibuprofen (Advil® and Motrin®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®) to make them more comfortable.
- Avoid:
  - Using soap on the sunburn.
  - Applying ointments or butter, which may cause more discomfort and are painful to remove.
  - Common first-aid burn creams or sprays, which don't relieve pain.
  - Anything that contains benzocaine, which can cause an allergic rash.

A sunburn causes pain and heat that may last for 48 hours. Peeling usually happens 5–7 days after your child gets sunburned.

### When should I call my doctor?

Call your child's doctor if your child:

- Can't look at light because of eye pain.
- Has a fever higher than 102°F.
- Has an infected sunburn.
- Starts acting very sick.
- Has blisters that start to break open.
- Appears dehydrated.

Note: You can give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for a temperature higher than 101°F. Children 6 months old and older can also take ibuprofen for a fever, unless they are dehydrated or vomiting (throwing up) continuously.

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