

# Protect the Skin You're In

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The American Academy of Dermatology Association (AAD) notes that skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States. It is estimated that one in five Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime. Protecting yourself from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays is an effective way to reduce skin cancer risk. Seeking shade, especially during peak sun hours of 10 am to 2 pm, wearing protective clothing (lightweight and long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses with UV protection), and wearing sunscreen on all skin not covered by clothing are all important behaviors to reduce your risk of skin cancer.

Sunlight consists of two types of harmful rays that reach the earth—UVA rays and UVB rays. Overexposure to either of these types of rays can lead to skin cancer. UVA rays (or aging rays) can also prematurely age your skin, causing wrinkles and age spots. UVB rays (or burning rays) are the primary cause of sunburn. The AAD recommends everyone over the age of 6 months should apply sunscreen every day on skin not covered by clothing if you will be outside. The sun emits harmful UV rays year-round, even on cloudy days. The AAD recommends choosing a Broad-spectrum (protects against both UVA and UVB rays) sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 30 or higher that is water resistant. Sunscreen should be applied 15 minutes before going outdoors, and reapplied about every two hours while outside, and after swimming or sweating. Most adults need about 1 ounce (or enough to fill a shot glass) to fully cover their exposed skin.

What about infants under the age of 6 months? Ideally, it is best to keep infants younger than 6 months of age in the shade when outdoors, and to dress them in protective clothing as listed above. If there's no shade available try creating a shady space using a stroller with a sun protective cover, or an umbrella or canopy. If possible, sunscreen use should be avoided in infants younger than 6 months. Speak to your infant's pediatrician if you have concerns about sun protection.

Does sunscreen lose its strength, or expire, over time? Sunscreen products are regulated as over-the-counter drugs by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA requires that all sunscreens retain their original strength for at least three years. Some sunscreens include an expiration date, if you find the expiration date has passed, throw out the sunscreen. If you purchase a bottle of sunscreen that doesn't list an expiration date, write your date of purchase on the bottle and if it's not used up within 3 years, you'll know to throw it out. Sunscreen bottles should not be stored in direct

sunlight or in a hot environment such as a car, as this could speed the degradation of the sunscreen ingredients.

Since exposure to harmful UV rays is the most preventable risk factor for skin cancer; protecting your skin from the sun is important for everyone.