

10 Worst Sun Slip-Ups

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You wear sunscreen outdoors and limit exposure to a few hours a day. You must be safe from skin cancer, right? Wrong! When it comes to protection, there's a lot more you need to know. Here are 10 sun slip-ups and what you can do to ward off troubles...

We know that staying healthy means eating right and exercising regularly. But do you wear sunscreen every day? And are you choosing the right product and applying it correctly?

Many women make simple sun protection mistakes that put their skin - and lives - at risk. Here are 10 common slip-ups, plus ways to fix them:

Sun slip-up #1: Having a “damage has been done” mentality

If you spent your teen years working on a golden tan, in your 30s, you may figure the worst damage has been done. No need to fuss with sunscreen, right? Think again.

A Food and Drug Administration (FDA) study found that only 23% of a person's lifetime sun exposure happens by age 20. So even with a misspent youth, it's not too late to stop sunbathing and start protecting your skin.

Here's why you should: Skin cancer is a daily threat. Melanoma, the deadliest form of the disease, kills more than 3,000 women a year.

Sun solution: Use sunscreen every day.

“It can decrease the risk of skin cancer and, by reducing UV exposure, you allow skin time to heal and give your immune system the chance to repair existing damage,” says Jordana Gilman, M.D., a spokeswoman for the Skin Cancer Foundation.

Sun slip-up #2: Not wearing sunglasses

You can't find your sunglasses, so you head outdoors without them. Bad move. Going without shades increases the risk of sun damage to your skin and eyes, which can lead to cancer, cataracts and macular degeneration.

Sun solution: Always have sunglasses on hand and keep an extra pair in your purse or car.

“Sunglasses should block 100% of [UVA and UVB] rays, so make sure it says so on the glasses' label,” says Southlake, Texas-based dermatologist Naila Malik.

She recommends larger-framed glasses with a close-fitting style, which provide “the best protection by reducing sunlight exposure to the eyes from above and beyond the periphery of your lenses.”

Plus, sunglasses keep you from squinting, which can create crows' feet – and no woman wants those.

Sun slip-up #3: Avoiding sunscreen around your eyes

Sunglasses alone aren't enough to shield the thin, delicate skin around your eyes from the sun's

harmful rays.

Unfortunately, many people avoid putting sunscreen there because they think it's too sensitive, says Jeannine Downie, M.D., director of Image Dermatology in Montclair, N.J., and co-author of *Beautiful Skin of Color* (HarperCollins).

In fact, that's exactly why you need sunscreen under your eyes. The sun's rays can break down its fragile skin more easily than other parts of your body.

Sun solution: Use a product that's hypo-allergenic and fragrance free or an eye cream with sunscreen.

Sun slip-up #4: Looking only at the SPF number

A product's sun protection factor (SPF) is important, but it's not enough to fully protect you, since it only wards off UVB rays, not UVA.

"UVA rays make up the majority of the UV radiation that we get and are present from sunup to sundown in equal amounts during summer *and* winter," says Katie Rodan, M.D., associate clinical professor of dermatology at Stanford University and author of *Write Your Skin a Prescription for Change* (Pair O' Docs MD Publishing).

And why is it important to make sure we protect ourselves from both kinds of rays?

"The sun's UVB rays cause burning and skin cancer," Rodan says. "Its UVA rays penetrate the skin more deeply and cause all the things we hate about our complexions as we get older, like wrinkles, sagging and brown spots."

Sun solution: Check the label for other active sunscreen ingredients that block UVA rays.

These include avobenzone (Parsol 1789), octocrylene, titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, oxybenzone and Mexoryl SX (also called ecamsule).

Other clues on the bottle? Words like "broad spectrum," "multispectrum" or "UVA/UVB protection."

To test-drive a few UVA/UVB sunscreens, pick up **Sephora's Sun Safety Kit** (\$115; www.sephora.com), a re-usable cosmetic case filled with samples of 12 protective products. An added bonus: 100% of net proceeds benefit the Skin Cancer Foundation.

Sun slip-up #5: Skimping on sunscreen

If you're using an SPF 15 but don't apply enough, you're actually getting just an SPF 6 or 7. And if you're like most people, you only apply 25%-50% of the recommended amount of sunscreen, according to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD). **Sun solution:** For a day outdoors, use a shot glass full (an ounce) for an adult and half that for a child, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. Reapply this amount every two hours.

After a day at the beach, a family of four should use up a 6-ounce bottle if everyone applies it twice during the day.

That may seem like a lot of pricey sunscreen. Still, don't skimp on the amount you use; buy the cheap stuff instead.

Price doesn't dictate quality or sun protection, Rodan says. "As long as it's got an SPF of at least 15, it doesn't matter what it costs."

So you don't miss any spots, get naked and apply sunscreen from head to toe a half hour before heading outside. That'll give it time to absorb into your skin.

Sun slip-up #6: Keeping the same bottle of sunscreen for years

Most sunscreens come with expiration dates, and they shouldn't be ignored.

That's because "a sunscreen's active ingredients break down and don't work as well," says Francesca Fusco, M.D., an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Medical Center.

Sun solution: Toss sunscreens that have passed their expiration date and buy new bottles. Besides, having out-of-date ones means you're probably not using enough.

Sun slip-up #7: Thinking sunscreen is all you need

Sunscreen is just *one* part of good sun protection, because no matter how well you use it, some UV radiation gets through to skin. So slathering it on and doing nothing else isn't enough protection, especially if you burn easily.

"No sunscreen blocks 100% of UV rays," Fusco says. You need to take additional steps. **Sun solution:** Other critical ways to protect skin include:

- Seeking shade between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when sun is strongest.
- Covering up with clothing, a broad-brimmed hat and UV-blocking sunglasses.
- Doing monthly self-skin exams and getting an annual one by your doctor or dermatologist. The AAD offers free screenings; find one near you at www.aad.org.
- Wear sun-protective clothing, the AAD recommends. You can usually find a UPF (ultraviolet protection factor) on its label. This rating system measures a fabric's ability to block the sun. UPF 20 protects against 95% of the sun's rays; UPF 50 protects against 98%.

Sun slip-up #8: Skipping sunscreen when you're indoors

Ninety percent of the sun's aging effects is incidental, not from long lazy days at the beach, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation.

"UVA light knows no bounds; it even goes through window glass," Rodan says. "I can look at patients in their 40s and 50s and tell whether they spend a lot of time in the driver's seat, because the left side has far more sun damage than the right."

Sun solution: If you're a frequent driver or your desk is near a window, apply sunscreen.

Wear it even when you're barely in the sun – for example, when you're walking to the mailbox or eating lunch in the park. A teaspoon for your face and neck is all you need.

Sun slip-up #9: Relying on label lingo

Claims like "protects all day," "sweat-proof" and "waterproof" sound good, but their meanings can vary from one sunscreen to the next. **Sun solution:** No matter what labels promise, you should reapply, "because the active ingredients in most products begin to break down when exposed to the sun," Fusco says.

Plus, their effectiveness is reduced if they're washed or sweated off. So slather on the sunscreen after swimming, sweating and every two hours.

Sun slip-up #10: Believing the "base tan" myth

Tanning salons claim a lot of things: bronzed skin you get from beds is safer than the sun and a base tan protects you from burning. Wrong!

"In fact, the UV radiation you get from tanning beds is 12-15 times as strong as regular sunlight," Downie says. "Tanning beds should be avoided at all costs."

Also, studies show that having your first exposure to tanning beds before the age of 35 increases your melanoma risk by 75%, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation.

Need more evidence? A report published by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC),

affiliated with the World Health Organization, said that a tanning bed's UV radiation is as dangerous as radon and plutonium for causing cancer.

Sun solution: If you're craving color, use a bronzer or apply a self-tanner, which contains a chemical that reacts with the amino acids in your skin to darken your skin. To be really safe, embrace the color you were born with.

Test Your Skin Cancer IQ

Consider this: Skin cancer is diagnosed more often than all other cancers combined. Have we caught your attention now? **Find out** just how much you know when it comes to skin cancer and prevention.

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