

## Summer without Sunburn...Is it Possible?

Ah summer! We wait so long for it to arrive, that when it does, we spend every moment we can, just to be outside doing all the things we like to do under the warmth of the sun.

Unfortunately summer can bring about the best or worst of experiences if not prepared. Growing up as a child with red hair and a fair complexion, I know only too well what it is like to feel the 'blister' rather than the kiss of the sun...that inferno sunburn! Today there is much known about the positive and negative effects of the sun and what we can do to protect ourselves from the latter.

The sun is the main source of ultraviolet (UV) radiation such as UVA and UVB. 95% of UVA is able to reach the earth's surface and while it is the weakest of the UV rays it still passes deep into the skin and can lead to such things as premature wrinkles and certain types of skin cancer. Only 5% of UVB rays reach the planet's surface, however they are slightly stronger than UVA and no less dangerous. These UV rays are responsible for causing direct damage to the skin like sunburns and are thought to cause most skin cancers.

According to the Canadian Cancer Society, skin cancer is the most common type of all cancers and whether your skin is fair, medium or dark, you're at risk. Studies show, that people who have suffered from severe sunburns in childhood and adolescence, are at greater risk for developing skin cancer. So before putting on a swimming suit or shorts to go outside and enjoy the sunny weather, make sure you **know the risks** of spending too much time under the sun and what you can do to **protect you and your family** from its harmful effects.

Start out by checking **Environment Canada's UV Index**. The UV Index measures the strength of the sun's burning UV rays. The higher the sun is in the sky, the higher the UV radiation, so it varies with the time of day and the time of the year. While UV radiation is highest under a cloudless sky, 80% or more can still get through light clouds, fog and mist. UV radiation can also be reflected or spread by different surfaces such as water, snow or even beach sand. The higher the UV Index number, the stronger the sun's rays so when the UV Index number reaches 3 or greater, it's time to become sun smart and do the following:

**-Slip** on sun protective clothing that is lightweight, loose fitting and covers as much skin as possible. The tighter the clothes fibers are woven together, the better the sun protection, as less UV radiation is able to pass through the material. Natural fabrics such as linen, cotton or hemp are good choices for protection and keeping you cool. If possible choose darker coloured clothing such as black, navy and dark red as they absorb more UV radiation than lighter shades such as white, sky blue or lime green. Also wet clothing offers less protection than dry but this will depend on the type of fabric used and the amount of moisture it absorbs. When it comes to babies, cover as much of their skin as possible with cool, loose-fitting clothes and wraps.

**-Slop** on sunscreen. Sunscreen works by absorbing or reflecting the sun's UV rays away from your skin. According to the Canadian Dermatology Association you should choose a product that has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher and is broad spectrum. The SPF number relates to the amount of time it takes for your skin to burn without any protection and how long it will take if you use the correct amount of sunscreen. In other words if you have the type of skin that burns after 20 minutes in the sun without protection than properly applying a sunscreen with a SPF of 30 will mean that you can spend up to 600 minutes (or 30 times longer) in the sun without getting sunburned. A broad spectrum sunscreen means that it filters out both UVA and UVB radiation. Apply a generous amount of sunscreen to all bare areas of the body 20 - 30 minutes before going outside to allow the product to bond to your skin and provide the protection you will need against the sun's rays. Reapply sunscreen about every 2 hours or after swimming or sweating a lot. Also don't forget your lips and apply a lip balm with a SPF 30. **Keep babies out of direct sunlight**, but if it cannot be avoided, than apply sunscreen to areas of the skin that are not covered by clothing. Follow the direction on the package for using a sunscreen product on babies less than 6 months old or check with a health care provider. Test a little amount of sunscreen on a small area of a child's arm or leg (or yourself if you have sensitive skin) to check for any signs of a skin reaction up to 48 hours later.

**-Slap** on a hat to protect the face, neck, head and ears. Broad brimmed and bucket hats provide the most protection against the sun's rays to the face and head. Legionnaire hats also provide good protection. Wearing a hat with a brim not only shades the eyes but can reduce UV radiation by 50%. Baseball caps are not advised as they do not provide enough protection to the ears, cheeks and neck.



Broad-brimmed hats should be at least 7.5 cm wide for an adult or 6 cm wide for a child under 10 years of age.



A bucket or surfer hat should have a deep crown and sit low on the head.

The brim width for preschoolers should be about 5 cm (adults at least 6 cm) and fit comfortably for the size of the head.



Legionnaire hats are better for people who are active or doing things that involve bending like gardening. For babies, choose a hat (such as a legionnaire hat) that will crumple easily when they lay their head down.

**-Seek** shade and try to limit the time you and your family spend when the sun's rays are at their strongest (11 am – 4 pm during the summer). Teach your children where to find shade (trees, buildings etc.) and how to tell when they should get into the shade (when their shadow is shorter than they are). Babies under 1 year of age should always be kept out of direct sunlight, either in a stroller that has a densely woven fabric cover with a mesh section for the baby to see and the air to circulate, under an umbrella or other shaded areas.

**-Slide** on sunglasses to protect your eyes from the sun's UV rays, bright light and blue light (the glare of light that reflects off snow or water). According to the Canadian Association of Optometrists you and your children should wear close fitting, wrap around style frames that cover as much of the eye area as possible. Sunglasses should be able to block 100% UVA and UVB rays and also be impact resistant for children.

The World Health Organization estimates, that about 80% of a person's exposure to harmful UV radiation, occurs before age 18, so teach by example and **be sun smart not sunburned!**