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## Summer sun brings warmth, danger

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# Sun brings warmth, but also danger

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SPECIAL TO HEALTHY FREDERICK

With summer vacation around the corner, children and adults alike are eager to escape outdoors. Before your fun, take this quiz to see how much you know about sun protection. Two local dermatologists share their expertise to keep your family safe this summer and all year long:



Metro Creative Connection photos

## 1. WHEN CAN YOUR SKIN BE DAMAGED BY THE SUN?

Any day of the year – even on cloudy, rainy or snowy days. Sunburn is caused by excessive exposure to ultraviolet radiation, said Dr. Wayne Xue of Comprehensive Dermatology Center. There are three types of UV light rays: UVA, UVB and UVC. Only UVA and UVB rays reach the earth. UVB is stronger on sunny days and reaches the top layer (epidermis) of skin. However, UVA is present year-round and can cause more damage to the skin because it also reaches the deeper layer of skin (dermis). UV rays also reflect off snow, ice, sand and water and cause burns as severe as direct sunlight. Tanning beds also generate UV rays.

## 2. WHAT ARE SOME LONG-TERM RESULTS OF UNPROTECTED SUN EXPOSURE?

People often refer to brown spots that appear on the skin as age spots. Actually, they should be called sun spots, said Dr. Ronald Prussick of Washington Dermatology Center. The spots are not inevitable with age. They can be avoided with proper sun protection. Skin that has been hidden from the sun (such as that under your bra strap) usually looks much younger and is spot-free. Sun exposure causes wrinkles

as well as broken blood vessels on the face and neck, which makes the skin look red. Too much unprotected time in the sun also results in many forms of cancer, including the deadly melanoma.

## 3. HOW MANY BURNS DOES IT TAKE TO CAUSE THESE SKIN AND HEALTH PROBLEMS?

The number of sunburns, particularly severe cases, proportionally increases the risk of cancer later in life, Dr. Xue said. A recent Mayo Clinic study found that skin cancer rates are increasing dramatically, particularly among people under age 40. Melanoma rates increased at eightfold for young women and fourfold for young men.

People with fair skin are at greatest risk, but no one is immune, according to the Mayo Clinic. People with dark skin can also end up with cancer, often on their palms or fingers. Regardless of your skin type, the sun's rays penetrate into the skin and can damage the DNA of skin cells.

The Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention state skin cancer is the most common form of cancer. The National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health reports that even one severe, blistering sunburn increases the risk of skin cancer.



Staff photo by Sam Yu  
The beaches at Cunningham Falls State Park were busy this Memorial Day weekend.

#### 4. HOW SHOULD YOU GUARD AGAINST SKIN DAMAGE?

The best protection is to avoid sunburn entirely. Wear sunscreen daily. Cover up. Wear wide-brimmed hats. Avoid the sun between 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

#### 5. ARE THERE ANY PARTS OF YOUR BODY THAT WON'T BURN?

No. The sun can even burn your eyes, according to the Mayo Clinic. Burnt eyes feel gritty and painful and can result in future cataracts. Wear sunglasses that offer 99% protection from UVA/UVB rays. Also pay attention to your hairline, Dr. Prussick said. If wearing a hat isn't practical, spray sunscreen onto your scalp.

#### 6. HOW DOES GETTING A BASE TAN HELP PROTECT YOUR SKIN?

It doesn't. "No tan is considered a safe tan," Dr. Prussick said. Avoiding sunburn doesn't mean you have avoided cancer risk. Any tan means there is a chance of damage to the DNA of cells. Tanning booths themselves also can prompt skin cancer. Even one exposure increases risk.

#### 7. WHAT TYPES OF SUNSCREEN ARE THE SAFEST?

Those that provide a physical barrier, such as zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, Dr. Prussick said. The barrier acts as a shield, allowing the rays to bounce off the skin. Chemical sunscreens work differently by interacting with the skin. While they

also offer protection, some of the ingredients can cause skin irritation or other health problems. Regardless of which type you use, the SPF rating should always be 30 or higher and protect against both UVA and UVB rays.

#### 8. WHEN SHOULD YOU APPLY SUNSCREEN?

Roughly 30 minutes before going outside, according to the Mayo Clinic. Reapply every two hours. If you're swimming or sweating, apply more frequently. Also, consider taking sun breaks. Sit in the shade or go indoors for a few moments when you're spending lots of time in the sun.

#### 9. CAN DIET HELP PROTECT AGAINST SUNBURN?

Some studies have shown Vitamin C has powerful anti-oxidant effects that significantly enhance sun protection, Dr. Xue said. The studies also found that Vitamin C reduces inflammation and burn from UV exposure. So grab a guava the next time you're at the supermarket.

However, don't rely on diet alone. "It's not like eating a bunch of apples and then going in the sun is going to make a difference," Dr. Prussick said. He recommends Heliocare, a plant-based capsule that is taken orally.

#### 10. HOW SHOULD YOU TREAT SUNBURN?

Treatment focuses on providing relief of discomfort, Dr. Xue said. Options include taking

painkillers (such as ibuprofen), bathing in cool water and applying aloe vera lotions or moisturizers. Drink lots of fluids to replace those being lost through the skin. Oral steroids also may be needed short-term. The Mayo Clinic advises caution in using any topical "caine" products. Benzocaine has been linked to a serious, albeit rare, condition that decreases the amount of oxygen the blood can carry. Never use these products on a child younger than 2 without medical supervision.

#### 11. WHAT NATURAL REMEDIES MERIT CONSIDERATION?

Oatmeal has long been recommended by dermatologists for its soothing and anti-inflammatory effects, Dr. Xue said. Strawberries, honey and milk are among other foods gaining attention recently.

#### 12. WHEN SHOULD YOU CONSULT A DOCTOR ABOUT YOUR SUNBURN?

When symptoms don't respond to over-the-counter treatments, if you have multiple blisters or the burn covers a large portion of your body. Also, seek medical care when the burn is accompanied by symptoms, such as vomiting, fever, dehydration or skin infection.

May is National Skin Cancer Awareness Month. To learn more about the risks and how to protect against them, visit [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com) or contact a dermatologist. ■