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## PRESS RELEASE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**BEST SUNBURN TREATMENT? PREVENTION.**

***A few simple preventative steps provide a wide range of benefits.***

Over a lifetime, sunburn and unprotected sun exposure can increase a person's risk of malignant melanoma and other forms of skin cancer.

Protecting skin is especially important for workers who are exposed to the sun between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

"It's not feasible for people such as farmers to avoid working outside during these peak sunlight hours," Sonja Koukel, New Mexico State University Professor/Extension Health Specialist, says. "There are a number of steps we can take to protect our skin from sun damage. The most effective way for anyone to prevent sunburn is to use sunscreen on your face, arms, hands and especially on the back of your neck. Zinc oxide is the preferred product because it's chemical free."

To protect skin from the effects of sunlight's UV (ultraviolet) radiation:

1. Apply sunscreen before going outdoors. Select a water-resistant sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or above. The product should have a broad spectrum of protection against both UV-A and UV-B rays. To avoid sweating off or washing off the sunscreen, reapply it often.
2. Use sunblock product on your lips that has been especially formulated to protect lips and has a SPF factor of 20 or more.
3. As much as possible, limit your time outdoors when the sun is at its peak (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) in most parts of the continental U.S.
4. Wear sunglasses that provide 99% - 100% UV protection. Wraparound sunglasses provide an extra measure of protection
5. Wear long pants, a shirt with long sleeves and a wide-brimmed hat.
6. Be aware that some medicines and skin care products can increase the risk of UV damage to your skin. These include certain antibiotics as well as some prescriptions used to treat psychiatric illness, high blood pressure, heart failure, acne and allergies. If you take prescription drugs and normally spend a great deal of time out of doors, ask your health care professional whether you need to take additional precautions to avoid sun exposure. Certain nonprescription skin care products containing alpha-hydroxy acids can make skin more vulnerable to sunlight damage.

“When you purchase a sunscreen product, be aware that some chemicals in sunscreen can cause an allergic reaction,” Koukel says. “I experienced this myself. I bought the product in a health food store, but three days after I used it, my face broke out like I had chicken pox. It took about five days before it cleared up. Not everyone reacts this way but be aware that it can happen.”

Sun-exposed skin, regardless of our age, can gradually lose moisture and essential oils, making it appear dry, flaky and prematurely wrinkled. Sunburn is a common name for skin injury that appears immediately after skin is exposed to UV radiation. In mild cases, sunburn cause only painful reddening of the skin. In more severe cases, tiny fluid-filled bumps (vesicles) or larger blisters appear.

Over time, actinic keratosis may develop. This is a tiny bump that feels like sandpaper or a small, scaly patch of sun-damaged skin that has a pink, red, yellow or brownish tint. Actinic keratosis doesn't generally go away unless it's frozen, chemically treated or removed by a physician. This condition may develop in areas of skin that have undergone repeated or long-term UV sunlight exposure.

"It's a warning sign of increased skin cancer risk," Koukel says. "About 10% to 15% of actinic keratoses eventually change into squamous cell cancers of the skin."

Collagen, a structural protein in our skin, can be changed by long-term UV sunlight exposure. Changes include premature aging of the skin and actinic purpura (bleeding from fragile blood vessels beneath the skin surface).

"Changes in the collagen of a deep layer of the skin (dermis) leads to wrinkles and fine lines," Koukel says. "In actinic purpura, UV radiation damage makes blood vessels more fragile and more likely to rupture during a slight impact."

As a rule, persons with fair skin and light eyes are at greater risk of sun-related skin damage and skin cancers. That's due to the fact that their skin contains less melanin (a pigment). Melanin helps protect skin from the effects of UV radiation.

“In most cases, your doctor can confirm that you have sun-damaged skin by examining the area,” Koukel says. “Often, when actinic keratosis develops, a biopsy is done to rule out skin cancers.”

If sunburn occurs, it will fade within a few days, provided there’s no re-exposure to sunlight without use of sunscreen or sunblock. Although prescription medications, non-prescription remedies and skin-resurfacing treatments may improve the appearance of sun damaged skin, some damage is permanent.

“For painful sunburn, try applying cool compresses (such as a cool, wet cloth) to the injured skin,” Koukel says. “You could also mist the area with sprays of cool water. If the discomfort persists, take a nonprescription pain medication such as ibuprofen or aspirin, unless you have a medical condition that prevents you from using these products. When in doubt, always check with your pharmacist or medical care professional.”

In severe sunburn cases, when severe blistering and pain are present, a physician may prescribe stronger anti-inflammatory medication.

If the following conditions exist, it’s time to contact your primary care physician or a dermatologist:

- Dry skin doesn’t respond to nonprescription treatments.
- Severe case of blistering sunburn.
- Milder sunburn over a large portion of your skin, especially if that condition makes it difficult to sleep or wear clothing.
- Persistent scaly patch or nodule anywhere on your skin, or a skin ulcer that does not heal.
- Abnormal bleeding under the skin or skin that easily bruises.
- Any change in moles.

“Sun damage can result in permanent cosmetic concerns, so prevention is truly the key here,” Koukel says. “However, more important than that is the long-term impact sun damage can have on the risk of developing skin cancer. The more unprotected sun exposure you have during your lifetime, the greater your risk of skin cancer, especially if you have a light complexion.

“For year we worshipped the sun,” Koukel adds. “Now we know we need to protect our skin from overexposure.”

For additional sun protection details, visit <https://www.cancer.net/blog/2015-07/10-tips-protecting-your-skin-sun>, <https://www.cancer.org/healthy/be-safe-in-sun/uv-protection.html>, and [https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic\\_info/sun-safety.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/sun-safety.htm).

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