



## Enjoy Fun in the Sun Safely

Summer Vacations are around the corner. Most kids are crazy about it. Summer is synonym of fun, beach, sun, and a lot of water sports and outdoor activities. Unprotected exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays can cause skin damage, eye damage, immune system suppression, and even cancer. Most children rack up between 50% and 80% of their lifetime sun exposure before age 18, so it's important that parents teach their children how to enjoy fun in the sun safely.

The sun radiates light to the earth, and part of that light consists of invisible ultraviolet (UV) rays. When these rays reach the skin, they cause tanning, burning, and other skin damage. UV rays react with a chemical in the skin called melanin. This is your first defense against the sun. It absorbs dangerous UV rays before they do serious skin damage. Melanin is found in different concentrations and colors, resulting in different skin colors. The lighter your child's natural skin color, the less melanin it has to absorb UV and protect itself. The darker your child's natural skin color, the more melanin it has to protect itself. As melanin increases in response to sun exposure, the skin tans. However, even that "healthy" tan may be a sign of sun damage. The risk of damage increases with the amount and intensity of sun exposure.

Unprotected sun exposure is even more dangerous for kids with:

- ❖ Moles on their skin (or whose parents have a tendency to develop moles)
- ❖ Very fair skin and hair
- ❖ A family history of skin cancer

With the right precautions, kids can safely play in the sun. Some effective strategies to prevent skin damage from the exposure to sun are:

### 1. **Seek the shade**

Avoid being in the sun for prolonged times from 10:00 AM until 4:00 PM. If your child is in the sun between these hours, as many kids are, be sure to apply protective sunscreen (even if he/she is just playing in the backyard). Even on cloudy, cool or overcast days, UV rays travel through the clouds and reflect off sand, water, and even concrete. Clouds and pollution don't filter out UV rays, and they can give a false sense of protection.

### 2. **Cover Up**

For all-day outdoor affairs, bring along a wide umbrella or a pop-up tent to play in. You can have your child to wear a hat, light long-sleeved shirt and or long pants.

### 3. **Use sunscreen**

There are many good sunscreens available for kids, including formulations for sensitive skin, brands with fun scents like watermelon, long-lasting waterproof and sweet proof versions, and easy application varieties in spray bottles. For sunscreen to do its job, it must be applied correctly. Be sure to:

- ❖ Use sunscreen whenever your child is in the sun. Apply a sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. The number 15 means that your are protected 15 times longer than you would be if you hadn't used sunscreen. For example, if you tend to sunburn after 10 minutes in the sun, you should not sunburn for 150 minutes when you use sunscreen with an SPF of 15.



- ❖ Apply sunscreen about 30 minutes before going outside so that a good layer of protection can form. Don't forget about lips, hands, ears, feet, shoulders, and behind the neck.
- ❖ Apply the sunscreen generously; do not try to stretch out the bottle. Reapply it approximately every 2 to 3 hours. Also, reapply after your child is sweating or swimming.
- ❖ Apply a waterproof sunscreen if your child will be around water or will go swimming. Be sure to reapply sunscreen when kids come out of the water.
- ❖ Sunscreen should not be applied to babies under 6 month of age, so they absolutely must be kept out of the sun whenever possible.
- ❖ Buy protective eyewear for kids. Sun exposure damages the eyes as well as the skin. The best way to protect eyes is to wear sunglasses.

Be sun safe yourself. Being a good role model by wearing sunscreen, eyeglasses, a hat, and limiting your time in the sun not only reduces your risk of becoming sunburned, it reduces your child's risk, too. Always remember that they'll watch to you and other adults trying to find clues on how to act. Everything you do, your children see and do. Therefore, this summer be responsible and clever. Enjoy with your children fun in the sun safely.



*Much of the information contained in this article was taken from The Skin Cancer Foundation Webpage, which is available at the following website:*

<http://www.skincancer.org/protect-your-kids/>

*Note: All information on this article is for educational purposes only. For specific medical diagnosis and treatment, consult your doctor.*

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