Safely Soaking Up the Sun

By Heather Bremner Claverie

THE SUN IS not only essential to survival, it can boost mood and well-being. Yet, it can also be deadly. Most skin cancers are caused by an excessive amount of exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays, the radiation emitted from sunlight. Fortunately, there are many ways to enjoy fun-filled outdoor activities while protecting the skin and eyes from harmful rays.

The Source

Deep-seated wrinkles are caused by UVA rays that have the least amount of energy from UV rays, which cause skin cells to age and are mainly linked to long-term skin damage. And, painful, red sunburns are caused by UVB rays that have more energy than UVA rays and that damage the skin cells directly, triggering sunburns and causing most skin cancers.

While sunlight is the main source of this type of electromagnetic radiation, UV rays can also result from man-made products such as tanning beds and sunlamps.

Who Is at Risk?

Although any exposure to sunlight between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., particularly during the spring and summer months, can cause skin cancer, it’s really long-term exposure that is most harmful. Children who suffer from multiple sunburns throughout childhood or individuals who work in the sun all day every day are at a higher risk of developing skin cancer.

In addition, certain risk factors can cause some individuals to be more susceptible to developing skin cancer. Fair-skinned individuals and those with freckles, blue and green eyes, and blond, red or light brown hair should be particularly vigilant when in the sun.

The Best Protection

Individuals can still enjoy the great outdoors under a veil of protection. The best advice is to stay in the shade by bringing an umbrella to the pool or finding a nice leafy tree to shield the sun.

Protective clothing can also help. If light filters through fabric, UV rays can seep through, too. Long-sleeved shirts and pants with tightly woven fabrics are the best bet to combat the sun. A wide-brimmed hat with at least a 2- to 3-inch brim that protects the face, neck and ears is essential. And, there is UV-protective clothing available, as well as products that give clothing SPF protection. Also, people should not forget sunglasses.

The Skinny on Sunscreen

Sunscreen is crucial sun defense, but only when reapplied amply and often. A shot glass full of broad-spectrum cream or spray of SPF 30 or higher should be applied and reapplied at least every two hours. When swimming or exercising, it may be necessary to apply it more often.

The higher the number on the sunscreen bottle, the higher the level of protection, but there is a point when a higher number is no longer more protective. For example, SPF 50 already filters out approximately 98 percent of UVB rays.

Enjoy That Fire-Filled Star Safely

It’s not surprising that people often feel energized and optimistic after a day in the sun. Vitamin D, the so-called “sunshine vitamin,” is derived from that golden orb. In addition to reducing depression, vitamin D boosts the immune system and fights disease. While certain foods and supplements can help satiate a vitamin D deficiency, many people want to enjoy those sun-kissed days. The good news is they can, as long as they slather on the sunscreen, throw on a straw hat and don sunglasses.

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Cover Up

Coolibar sells an array of sun-protective apparel and accessories and all its fabrics are UPF 50+. The Minnesota-based company says it refers to all its products as “UPF 50+” rather than “SPF” because SPF is specific to the amount of time sun-exposed skin is protected when wearing sunscreen, while UPF indicates what fraction of the sun’s UV rays can penetrate fabric. Coolibar’s lightweight bathing suits, shirts, pants and hats are designed with breathable, fast-drying fabric. Prices vary; www.coolibar.com/featured-collection.html

Go Undercover

Made with Solarteck sun-blocking material, UV Blocker’s UV Protection Travel Umbrella measures 44 inches and will block out 99 percent of UVA and UVB rays. Also, the company’s patented Vented Mesh System allows wind to pass between the upper and lower canopies, keeping individuals 15 degrees cooler. Even better, the umbrella is light and small enough to fit into a carry-on bag or suitcase. $44.95; uv-blocker.com

Shopping Guide to Sun Safety

Slather It On

Badger’s Tangerine and Vanilla Broad Spectrum SPF 30 sunscreen with its Creamsicle-like smell is designed for children. And, since active, young children need an ample amount of sun protection, this sunscreen offers a protective coat that lasts up to 40 minutes when swimming and sweating. $12.95; www.amazon.com/Badger’s+Tangerine+and+Vanilla+Broad+Spectrum+SPF+30+sunscreen

Stay Sensitive

Babyganics Sunscreen Lotion 50 SPF is a broad-spectrum lotion with UVA/UVB protection for babies. Non-allergenic and tear-free, its plant-derived ingredients provide babies with a fragrance- and paraben-free lotion. $13.97 for 6oz 2 pack; www.amazon.com/Babyganics-Baby-Sunscreen-Lotion-Tube/dp/B00HYV2F7E

Pucker Up

The lips are often neglected when it comes to sun protection, but Sun Bum’s fun line of colorful tinted balms places them in the spotlight. The company’s Original SPF 30 Sunscreen Lip Balms are filled with aloe and vitamin E to protect and moisturize. All of Sun Bum’s products are made for sensitive skin and are vegan- and paraben-free. $3.99; www.sunbum.com/collections/sunscreen-plp/products/spf-30-sunscreen-lip-balm-pomegranate

Just Wash It

One laundry cycle with the Rit Sun Guard Laundry Treatment UV Protectant will give clothes 20 washes worth of sun protection. The versatile product is safe to use with any washable fabrics, including cotton, linen, rayon and silk. While it won’t alter the look or feel of the clothing, it will provide a layer of UPF protection of 30. $24.95; www.amazon.com/Rit+Sun+Guard+Laundry+Treatment+UV+Protectant&qid=1584466998&sr=8-3