



## Take charge of protecting yourself against UV rays



Summer is a time for picnics, ballgames, and outdoor activities. As you step outdoors and welcome the beautiful day, it is essential to remember to protect yourself from weather conditions. Just as important as it is to grab an umbrella if it is raining, it is equally important to protect yourself from the sun, especially during these summer months.

### What's in the sunshine?

While being in the sunshine can make you happier than “when skies are gray” (as the 1940s, Jimmie Davis ‘You are my sunshine’ song mentions), stepping out without protecting yourself can be harmful to your health. Two sunshine rays which commonly reach the Earth are the sun’s ultraviolet (UV) radiations UVA and UVB. The Environmental Protection Agency ( [www.epa.gov/SUNWISE/doc/sunuvu.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/SUNWISE/doc/sunuvu.pdf) ) provides us with the following information regarding these types of radiation.

- UVA radiation — UVA rays will not commonly burn you; however, the rays can be harmful if you are not cautious about your exposure. UVA rays sink deep into your skin and can cause cancer without any warning. The deep skin entry could result in the body’s poor attempt to fight infection for up to 24 hours, because your body’s immune system has been affected from the radiation. In addition, if this UVA radiation reflects into your unprotected eyes, it may result in eye damage and even cataracts.
- UVB radiation — Since the Earth is tilted closest towards the sun during these summer months, the amount of UVB rays reaching you is greater. These UVB rays leave harmful sunburns and can cause your skin to look leathery or more worn out. By lowering exposure to the sun’s UVB rays you can help prevent your risk of skin cancer. This is why it is so important to stay protected.

### How can you protect yourself?

There are many ways you can take charge and protect your health against the “dark side” of the sun.

- Clothing — When going outdoors, it’s important to wear smart protective clothing. Light colored and loose fitting clothing aids in reflecting the sun’s rays away from you and allows the skin to receive airflow. Wearing a hat with a wide brim will protect the head and face from the sunlight. A smart way to protect your eyes is to wear sunglasses that have a 100 percent UV reflective tag attached to them.

Sunglasses will not only stop you from squinting, but will protect eyes from the sun’s radiation damage.

- Sunscreen — Applying sunscreen anytime you leave your house in summer months will have high benefits. Since UV radiation can reach you even on cloudy days, sunscreen application that is at least 15 SPF is a must for all parts of your skin and lips. Sunscreen companies have even come out with high sun protection lotions which go even up to 70+ SPF. This lotion is beneficial for people who burn easily, or have sensitive, freckling, or very light skin.
- Place and Time — Minimizing direct sun exposure is very important. UV light reaches its highest levels between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. It is during these times where being outdoors is risky. If you must be out between these times, try to remain in shaded areas and ALWAYS protect yourself, as mentioned above. Take caution around areas of water, where UV radiations are more likely to reflect off of the water and onto you. Before going outdoors you can log onto the Environmental Protection Agency UV Index Calculator’s website at [www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html) to view the daily UV levels in your area. Remember, the lower the reading, the lower your risk of danger.
- Know the skin you’re in — Even if you practice good sun protection and have no family history of skin cancer, it is important to be familiar with the look of your skin. Look out for new skin moles as well as a change in size, color, or unusual shape of preexisting moles. If you have any concerns, consult your doctor immediately for a cancer screening. Regular cancer screenings are one of the “10 Keys” to Healthy Aging.

Please, don’t take your sunshine away” completely during these summer months. Simply remember to stay sun smart and visit your doctor for regular cancer screenings in order to continue living for a “Healthier Tomorrow”.

*This column was written by Alicia Owens, Center for Healthy Aging Student Intern and Senior in the College of Health, Environment and Science at Slippery Rock University. For more information about Cancer Screenings, check out the Center for Healthy Aging’s website at: [www.healthyinging.pitt.edu](http://www.healthyinging.pitt.edu)*

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