

15 Myths about Sun Protection

1. It is not possible to get sunburn on cloudy or cool days.

FALSE! You can get sunburn on mild days due to the high levels of UV radiation that can penetrate clouds. It is important that you protect your skin as usual under these weather conditions.

2. If your cosmetics contain sunscreen, you do not need to use sunscreen.

FALSE! Foundations and moisturizers that contain sunscreen are fine if you are outside for short periods such as a quick trip to the shops at lunchtime. However, if you need to spend periods of time in the sun, use a separate sunscreen and reapply it every 2 hours – not just once in the morning. Be aware that most cosmetic products offer protection that is much lower than the minimum recommended SPF30+.

3. Only sunbathers get skin cancer.

FALSE! Most people get burnt when they are not deliberately seeking a tan. It often occurs when they least expect it such as when they are working in the garden, walking the dog, or just having a picnic.

4. People with olive or darker skin are not at risk for skin cancer.

FALSE! Regardless of skin type, if you spend extended periods of time in the sun unprotected you are at higher risk of developing skin cancer than someone who protects their skin. People who tan easily or are dark skinned have a lower risk than people with fair skin that burns easily, but they are still at risk of skin damage and skin cancer.

5. People need plenty of sun exposure to avoid vitamin D deficiency.

FALSE! If your doctor determines that you are deficient in Vitamin D, you will likely be told to take a supplement. In general, during summer, a few minutes of sun exposure outside peak times (10am-4pm) provides sufficient vitamin D. During winter, 2-3 hours of sun exposure spread throughout the week is sufficient for vitamin D.

6. Fake tans darken the skin, so that means your skin is protected from the sun.

FALSE! Fake tanning lotion does not improve your body's ability to protect itself from the sun, so you will still need sun protection.

7. You can't get burnt in the car through a window.

FALSE! Most glass used for windows blocks UVB but not UVA rays. So while it reduces the risk of sunburn, it does not prevent long-term damage caused by UVA rays. Even if your car windows are tinted, you need to use sun protection.

8. If you tan but don't burn, you don't need to bother with sun protection.

FALSE! If your skin turns brown, it is a sign of sun damage, even if there is no redness or peeling. Your skin turns brown as a way of just trying to protect itself because the UV rays are damaging living cells. If you tan easily, you are still at risk of skin cancer and need to use sun protection.

9. You don't have to be concerned with skin cancer because if it happens you will see it and it is easy to treat.

FALSE! Skin cancer treatment can be much more serious than having a lesion 'burnt off'. It can include surgery and chemotherapy, and may result in permanent scarring. Skin cancer can also spread to other parts of your body. Check your skin regularly and consult your doctor immediately if you notice any changes. Prevention is always better than cure.

10. Sunscreen is all you need to stay safe.

FALSE! Sunscreen is only one piece of the puzzle. Other pieces include seeking shade between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM, covering up with clothing, wearing broad-brimmed hats and wearing UV sunglasses, completing self skin exams/exams on your children, and scheduling for annual professional skin evaluations for yourself.

11. You don't need to wear sunscreen if you're going to be inside most of the day.

FALSE! About 20 per cent of all sun damage is associated with lying on the beach/sunbathing. The other 80 per cent happens while walking to the shops, driving in the car, and sitting beside a window. UVA rays are also emitted by fluorescent lights and computer screens, so constant protection is essential. Make the application of sunscreen a part of your daily routine.

12. There is no real difference in how UVA and UVB rays affect the skin.

FALSE! UVB rays penetrate the top layer of skin causing it to burn. UVA rays penetrate deeper and causes signs of premature aging; including wrinkling and age spots, and can also suppress the immune system. Excessive exposure to both types of radiation may lead to skin cancer. When searching for a sunscreen please look for one which is "broad spectrum" which protects from both UVA and UVB rays.

13. Some sunscreens are waterproof and sweat proof and will not come off throughout the day.

FALSE! The FDA is working on banning the word 'waterproof' and hopes to replace the term with 'water/sweat/perspiration resistant' as those terms are considered more accurate to describe the nature of the sunscreen. Ultimately it is important to re-apply, re-apply, re-apply!

14. When using aerosol sunscreens, you can easily cover your body without missing a spot, therefore effectively protecting your skin.

FALSE! While being applied, aerosol sunscreens can miss areas, as not all of the product lands on your body when you are spraying it on.

15. It is safe to stay out in the sun as long as you are wearing a sunscreen with a high SPF.

FALSE! It's never safe to stay out in the sun. The amount of sun exposure experienced does not depend just on the length of time in the sun; it is also determined by geographic location, time of day, weather conditions and an individual's skin type. Sunscreens with higher SPF ratings may offer better sun protection but you should still use other protection methods, including use of shade. *It is recommended that your sunscreen has an SPF 30+. Never forget to apply sunscreen 20-30 minutes prior to going outside and re-apply every 2 hours.*