10 myths about sun protection

Content

1. **It is not possible to get sunburnt on windy, cloudy or cool days.**
   
   FALSE. You can get burnt on windy, cloudy and cool days.
   
   Sunburn is caused by UV radiation which is not related to temperature. A cooler or windy day in summer will have a similar UV index to a warmer day. If it’s windy and you get a red face it’s likely to be sunburn. There’s no such thing as ‘windburn’.

   You can also get sunburnt on cloudy days, as UV radiation can penetrate some clouds and may even be more intense due to reflection off the bottom of the clouds.

   Check the SunSmart UV Alert every day and protect your skin when UV levels are three or above, even when you are in the sun for short periods. The SunSmart UV alert is available at [www.cancersa.org.au](http://www.cancersa.org.au) and in the weather section of most daily newspapers or at [www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv](http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv). A SunSmart app for iPhones that predicts the UV level for each day can also be downloaded from the iTunes App store.

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

   FALSE. You should wear sunscreen under your makeup if you’re going to be in the sun.

   Foundations and moisturisers 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 two hours, not just once in the morning. Be aware that most cosmetic products offer protection that is much lower than the maximum recommended SPF30 or higher.

3. **People with olive skin are not at risk of skin cancer.**

   FALSE. People with olive skin can get skin cancer too.

   Regardless of skin type if you spent your childhood in the sun without adequate protection you are at higher risk of developing skin cancer than someone who grew up with good sun protection. People who tan easily or are naturally 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. And generally when skin cancers do occur they are detected at a later, more dangerous stage.
Care still needs to be taken in the sun.

4. Solariums are a safe way to get a ‘base tan’ to start off the summer.
FALSE. Solariums are not a safe way to tan.

Solariums emit UV radiation that is up to three times stronger than the midday sun, so they can damage your skin even faster than a ‘natural’ suntan. Research shows that using a solarium can significantly increase your risk of melanoma. There is no safe way to tan, whether from the sun or a solarium.

5. People need plenty of sun exposure to avoid vitamin D deficiency.
FALSE. You do not need to expose yourself to the sun during peak UV times to get enough vitamin D.

For most people, adequate vitamin D levels are reached through regular incidental exposure to the sun.

When the UV Index is 3 or above (August - May in South Australia), the majority of people maintain adequate vitamin D levels just by spending a few minutes outdoors on most days of the week.

Sensible sun protection does not put people at risk of vitamin D deficiency.

In June and July, when the UV Index typically falls below 3 in southern states, we recommend spending time outdoors in the middle of the day with skin uncovered to support vitamin D production. Being physically active e.g. gardening or going for a brisk walk, also helps boost vitamin D levels.

Increasing your sun exposure beyond the recommended level does not increase your vitamin D.

6. A fake tan darkens 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.

Some fake tans have an SPF rating. However like sunscreens, this only gives protection for around two hours and then needs to be reapplied for continued protection.

7. You don’t have to be concerned about 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, chemotherapy and can result in permanent scarring.

Skin cancer can also metastasise and spread to other parts of your body. Each year more than 1,850 Australians die of skin cancer.

Be alert for any new moles or changes to existing moles and consult your GP immediately if you notice anything concerning. And remember prevention is always better than cure.

8. Only sunbathers get skin cancer.
FALSE. Excessive exposure to the sun does not just happen when deliberately seeking a tan.

In a sunny country like Australia we can be exposed to high levels of UV radiation during all sorts of daily activities such as working outdoors, gardening, walking the dog or having a picnic. This sun exposure adds up over time and increases our risk of skin cancer.

9. If you tan but don’t burn, you don’t need to bother with sun protection.
FALSE Even if you tan you need sun protection.
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 trying to protect itself because the UV rays are damaging living cells. A suntan offers limited sunburn protection of around SPF3 but doesn’t protect against further DNA damage. If you tan easily you are still at risk of skin cancer and need to use sun protection.

10. You can’t get burnt in the car or through a window.

FALSE. You can get burnt through a window.

Glass reduces but does not completely block transmission of UV radiation so you can still get burnt if you spend a long time in the car or behind a window when the UV is high. More commonly people are burnt in cars with the windows down where they can be exposed to high levels of UV radiation.

Want to know where this information comes from? Click here.

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