

WELL BALANCED

- JULY 2026 -
UV Awareness Month



No matter the weather—sunny, cloudy, or cool—ultraviolet (UV) rays are still reaching you and can affect your skin, eyes, and overall health. UV Awareness Month, recognized in July, is a timely reminder to build understanding around the risks of UV exposure. Because UV rays are the leading cause of most skin cancers, staying vigilant about sun protection is essential—not just in summer, but year-round. Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States and Canada, and by being aware of these facts and practicing sun safety, you can help protect your skin and overall health.

Understanding UV Rays

UV rays are a form of invisible radiation emitted by the sun, as well as by artificial sources such as tanning beds and sunlamps. They can harm your skin and eyes, even if you can't see them or feel their effects right away. There are three types of UV rays:

- **UVA:** Contribute to skin aging and wrinkling and can damage skin cells in ways that may lead to cancer.
- **UVB:** The primary cause of sunburn; damages the skin's outer layers. Exposure is linked to most skin cancers.
- **UVC:** The most dangerous type, but it's absorbed by the Earth's atmosphere and does not reach the ground.



Did You Know?

The UV Index predicts ultraviolet radiation levels on a scale from 1 to 11+. If the index is 3 or higher, it's a good idea to take protective measures. Check the daily [UV Index](#) to better understand your risk.

Taking precautions against UV rays is important every day—not just when it's sunny. UV rays can pass through clouds and reach your skin even on overcast or cool days. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- UV rays peak between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- UV rays are more intense during the spring and summer months
- UV exposure increases the closer you are to the equator
- UV levels are higher at higher elevations
- UV rays can reflect off surfaces such as water, sand, snow, and cement.

The Impact of Exposure to UV Rays

Exposure to UV rays without proper protection can lead to a range of significant health concerns affecting both the skin and eyes, including:

- **Sunburn:** When the skin's natural pigment, *melanin*, is unable to absorb UV rays effectively, sunburn can occur. This results in pain, redness, and sometimes blistering.
- **Premature aging:** UV damage contributes to visible signs of aging on the skin. These signs include freckling, brown spots, wrinkling, loss of collagen, and widening of small blood vessels.
- **Cataracts and other eye problems:** UV rays can have detrimental effects on vision. *Cataracts* (characterized by a cloudy lens), eye pain, general eye damage, and other vision issues may develop from unprotected UV exposure.
- **Skin cancer:** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are three primary types of skin cancer: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma. Early detection is crucial for all forms of skin cancer, as it can greatly improve treatment outcomes. Among these, melanoma is generally considered the most serious.

Tips to Protect Yourself

- **Seek shade:** A general rule is that if your shadow is shorter than you are, it's a good idea to find shade from the sun.
- **Wear protective clothing:** Wearing protective clothing is an effective way to shield your skin from harmful UV rays. Consider opting for long-sleeved shirts and long pants, or long skirts or dresses, which act as a physical barrier between your skin and the sun. When spending time at the beach or pool, t-shirts and cover-ups provide additional protection. Keep in mind that clothing may offer reduced protection when it becomes wet, and in general, darker colored clothes tend to block more UV rays than lighter colored ones.
- **Choose the right hat:** A hat is a simple way to protect often-overlooked areas like the face, ears, and neck from the sun. Wide-brimmed hats provide the best coverage, while styles with holes, such as straw hats, may let more sunlight through.
- **Protect your eyes:** Protecting your eyes is an essential part of sun safety. To reduce the risk of UV damage, choose sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB rays.
- **Use sunscreen:** Wearing sunscreen is one of the most important ways to protect your skin from UV damage. Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen, which protects against both UVA and UVB rays, with an SPF of at least 30. Opt for a water-resistant formula, especially if you'll be swimming or sweating, as indicated on the label. Reapply every two hours, or more often if you are swimming or sweating. Finally, be sure to check the expiration date to make sure your sunscreen is still effective.
- **Avoid indoor tanning beds/devices:** Indoor tanning devices are associated with an increased risk of melanoma. The American Academy of Dermatology Association (AADA) opposes indoor tanning and supports a ban on the production and sale of tanning equipment for nonmedical purposes.



Did You Know?

SPF stands for sunburn protection factor. It's recommended to choose a sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher. Also, keep in mind that no sunscreen is truly waterproof, though some are water-resistant for 40 to 80 minutes. Always check the label for details.

- **Complete regular skin checks:** Check your skin regularly for changes in appearance or texture. Watch for new, changing, or unusual spots, paying close attention to size, color, and other differences. Consult with a health care provider if you have any concerns.

Protection from UV and the sun isn't just seasonal. UV exposure can add up over time, and small daily habits can help you stay healthy and well.

Resources

- » UV Awareness Month (aad.org)
- » UV Index Search (enviro.epa.gov)

Sources

- » <https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/sun-safety/index.html>
- » <https://www.aad.org/public/diseases/skin-cancer/prevent/how>
- » <https://www.aad.org/public/everyday-care/sun-protection/shade-clothing-sunscreen/how-to-select-sunscreen>
- » <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/sun-safety/skin-cancer.html>
- » <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/ultraviolet-radiation>
- » <https://www.cdc.gov/radiation-health/data-research/facts-stats/ultraviolet-radiation.html>
- » <https://www.aad.org/media/stats-indoor-tanning>

