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Looking after your skin in the sun – Top Tips

Waking up to a sunny day either at home or away on holiday can lift our mood, encouraging us to spend some time outdoors enjoying the fresh air and getting some vitamin D! However, we must all remember to look after our skin to help protect ourselves from sunburn and the risk of skin cancer.

The most effective ways to look after skin in the sun is to spend time in the shade between 11am-3pm when the sun is at its strongest, and to cover up with suitable clothing, for example by wearing a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.

It is particularly important for babies and young children who have more sensitive skin and should stay out of direct sunlight.

Sunscreen is not an alternative to seeking shade or covering up, but it does offer additional protection, and should be worn at all times when you are out in the sun.

Choosing the right sunscreen can be difficult – there are so many available to buy nowadays, offering different levels of protection against UVA and UVB rays. The level of protection offered by the product is described by the 'sun protection factor' (SPF) and a star system.

But what exactly does all this mean, and how can we make an informed choice to select the best sunscreen for ourselves and our families? It might be helpful to understand:-

- If it takes 20 minutes for your unprotected skin to start to burn (turn red), a SPF 15 will protect your skin for 15 times longer (i.e. ~ 5 hours)
- SPF only relates to protection against UVB light – the rays predominantly responsible for burning (*UVB = burn*)
- UVA radiation causes skin ageing and contributes to DNA damage, which can lead to skin cancer
- UVA protection is measured with the star system from 1-5 – the more stars, the better

Therefore, it is generally advised to use SPF 30 with a high UVA protection. Your community pharmacist can provide further advice if you are unsure, by taking in to account your skin type, where you are going on holiday, what medication you take (some can make your skin more sensitive to the sun) and if you have any other skin conditions, such as eczema.

How should we apply sunscreen effectively?

- People commonly use about half the amount that is required
- Apply **liberally** to all exposed areas (remembering back of hands and ears!) ~ 30 minutes before going out in the sun, and reapply every 2 hours (or more if you are in water or sweating – even when using waterproof formulations)

And finally, don't forget:-

- UV radiation penetrates the clouds, so it is still possible to burn on a cloudy day
- UV radiation is reflected from the sea surface, which means you may be exposed to more UV rays than you think on days you are by the beach. Check the expiry date of your sunscreen! – most have a shelf-life of 2-3 years