



Sun Awareness

by Jo Ann Serota, RN, MSN, CPNP

The sunny, warm days of summer are finally approaching after this long, cold, wet and sometimes snowy winter. We can't wait to be active outside again. But before doing so, remember that the sun is not always very kind.

The best way to prevent the long-term risks of sunburn, (cancer, premature aging and sagging skin) is to practice sun protection and child education about sun-safety all year long.

Sensible sun protection begins with a sunscreen with an SPF (sun protective factor) of at least 15 that blocks the UVA (ultraviolet A) and UVB (ultraviolet B) radiation and is PABA free. PABA stands for p-amino benzoic acid and is used as a preservative, but can itself be toxic in small children. Sunscreens used in children younger than 1 year should not contain PABA.

Here are ten sensible steps to take for sun protection, according to a pamphlet published by the Skin Cancer Foundation:

1. Keep infants and young children out of the sun whenever possible;
2. Watch the time whenever you and your children are in the sun. The time can pass very quickly when you are having fun;
3. Cover your child with light weight clothing when in the sun, either direct or reflected, light;

4. Use a sunscreen. Replenish the sunscreen on your child every few hours and after swimming;

5. Beware of reflected light. A child under a beach umbrella can become severely burned from the sun light reflecting from the sand;

6. Be especially careful if at high altitudes or when closer to the equator. Remember, children and adults can suffer severe sun exposure even when skiing in the winter if at high altitudes;

7. Avoid artificial tanning devices. They have been found to be very dangerous despite the salons assurances;

8. Don't mix sun exposure with certain medications. Sulfa drugs, for example, commonly used for ear infections can accentuate the effects of sunlight. If you are in doubt about the effects of a medication your or your child are taking, please check with your physician or pharmacist;

9. Examine your child's skin regularly when in the sun. If your child is becoming red (or even pinker) take a break during the peak mid-day hours;

10. Don't forget, your behavior and attitude about the sun are setting a lifelong example for your child.

For more information about sun safety, please write The Skin Cancer Foundation, Box 561, New York, NY 10156. And have a safe and happy summer.

<http://www.amblerpeds.com/articles04.html>

