



# Sunscreen and Sun Safety

(from NHS)

**Advice for adults and children on sunscreen and sun safety in the UK and abroad.**

Sunburn increases your risk of skin cancer. Sunburn doesn't just happen on holiday – you can burn in the UK, even when it's cloudy. There's no safe or healthy way to get a tan. A tan doesn't protect your skin from the sun's harmful effects. Aim to strike a balance between protecting yourself from the sun and [getting enough vitamin D from sunlight](#).

## ***Sun safety tips***

Spend time in the shade when the sun is strongest. In the UK, this is between 11am and 3pm from March to October.

### ***Make sure you:***

- spend time in the shade between 11am and 3pm
- make sure you never burn
- cover up with suitable clothing and sunglasses
- take extra care with children
- use at least factor 15 sunscreen

### ***What factor sunscreen (SPF) should I use?***

Don't rely on sunscreen alone to protect yourself from the sun. Wear suitable clothing and spend time in the shade when the sun's at its hottest.

When buying sunscreen, the label should have:

- a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 to protect against UVB
- at least four-star UVA protection

UVA protection can also be indicated by the letters "UVA" in a circle, which indicates that it meets the EU standard.

Make sure the [sunscreen is not past its expiry date](#). Most sunscreens have a shelf life of two to three years.

Don't spend any longer in the sun than you would without sunscreen.



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## ***What are the SPF and star rating?***

The sun protection factor, or SPF, is a measure of the amount of ultraviolet B radiation (UVB) protection.

SPFs are rated on a scale of 2-50+ based on the level of protection they offer, with 50+ offering the strongest form of UVB protection.

The star rating measures the amount of ultraviolet A radiation (UVA) protection. You should see a star rating of up to five stars on UK sunscreens. The higher the star rating, the better.

The letters "UVA" inside a circle is a European marking. This means the UVA protection is at least one third of the SPF value and meets EU recommendations.

Sunscreens that offer both UVA and UVB protection are sometimes called broad spectrum.

## ***How to apply sunscreen***

Most people don't apply enough sunscreen. As a guide, adults should aim to apply around:

- two teaspoons of sunscreen if you're just covering your head, arms and neck
- two tablespoons if you're covering your entire body while wearing a swimming costume

If sunscreen is applied too thinly, the amount of protection it gives is reduced. If you're worried you might not be applying enough SPF15, you could use a stronger SPF30 sunscreen.

If you plan to be out in the sun long enough to risk burning, sunscreen needs to be applied twice:

- 30 minutes before going out
- just before going out

Sunscreen should be applied to all exposed skin, including the face, neck and ears – and head if you have thinning or no hair – but a wide-brimmed hat is better.

Sunscreen needs to be reapplied liberally and frequently, and according to the manufacturer's instructions.



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This includes applying it straight after you've been in water – even if it's "water resistant" – and after towel drying, sweating, or when it may have rubbed off.

## ***Swimming and sunscreen***

Water washes sunscreen off, and the cooling effect of the water can make you think you're not getting burned. Water also reflects ultraviolet (UV) rays, increasing your exposure.

Water-resistant sunscreen is needed if sweating or contact with water is likely.

Sunscreen should be reapplied straight after you've been in water – even if it's "water resistant" – and after towel drying, sweating, or when it may have rubbed off.

## ***Children and sun protection***

Take extra care to protect babies and children. Their skin is much more sensitive than adult skin, and damage caused by repeated exposure to sunlight could lead to skin cancer developing in later life.

Children aged under six months should be kept out of direct strong sunlight.

From March to October in the UK, children should:

- cover up with suitable clothing
- spend time in the shade – particularly from 11am to 3pm
- wear at least SPF15 sunscreen

Apply sunscreen to areas not protected by clothing, such as the face, ears, feet, and backs of hands. Get more [sun safety advice for children](#).

To ensure they get enough vitamin D, all [children under five are advised to take vitamin D supplements](#).

## ***Protect your eyes in the sun***

A day at the beach without proper eye protection can cause a temporary but painful burn to the surface of the eye, similar to sunburn.

Reflected sunlight from snow, sand, concrete and water, and artificial light from sunbeds, is particularly dangerous.

Avoid looking directly at the sun, as this can cause permanent eye damage.



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## ***Clothing and sunglasses***

Wear clothes and sunglasses that provide sun protection, such as:

- a wide-brimmed hat that shades the face, neck and ears
- a long-sleeved top
- trousers or long skirts in close-weave fabrics that don't allow sunlight through
- sunglasses with wraparound lenses or wide arms with the CE Mark and European Standard EN 1836:2005

## ***How to deal with sunburn***

Sponge sore skin with cool water, then apply soothing aftersun or calamine lotion.

Painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, will ease the pain by helping to reduce inflammation caused by sunburn.

Seek medical help if you feel unwell or the skin swells badly or blisters. Stay out of the sun until all signs of redness have gone.

Read more about [treating sunburn](#).

Get tips on [preventing and treating heat exhaustion](#) in hot weather.

## ***Who should take extra care in the sun?***

You should take extra care in the sun if you:

- have pale, white or light brown skin
- have freckles or red or fair hair
- tend to burn rather than tan
- have many moles
- have skin problems relating to a medical condition
- are only exposed to intense sun occasionally – for example, while on holiday
- are in a hot country where the sun is particularly intense
- have a family history of skin cancer



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People who spend a lot of time in the sun, whether it's for work or play, are at increased risk of skin cancer if they don't take the right precautions.

People with naturally brown or black skin are less likely to get skin cancer, as darker skin has some protection against UV rays. But skin cancer can still occur.

The Cancer Research UK website has a tool where you can [find out your skin type](#) to see when you might be at risk of burning.