



## Preventing Skin Cancer

### The Issue

No one is completely safe from the sun. The risk of skin cancer today is much greater than it was 20 years ago and continues to increase.

We are exposed to more ultraviolet (UV) rays because the protective layer of ozone around the earth has become thinner due to the effects of pollution and chemicals.

Over time, exposure to UV rays can cause skin cancer.

Most cases of skin cancer are preventable. You can reduce your risk of getting skin cancer by taking some simple but important steps.

### Background

There are 3 types of UV rays:

- Ultraviolet A rays (UVA) make up most of the sun's natural light. They can penetrate deep into the skin causing wrinkles and aging.
- Ultraviolet B rays (UVB) are the most damaging to our skin. They are the main cause of sunburns as they are nearly 1000 times stronger than UVA rays.
- Ultraviolet C rays (short-wave radiation) never reach the earth's surface because the atmosphere filters them out.

In Canada, sunlight is strong enough to cause skin cancer and premature aging of the skin. UV rays can get through clouds, fog and haze. Water, sand, concrete and especially snow can reflect, and even increase, the sun's burning rays.

The risk of skin cancer is higher for people who:

- have light-coloured skin, eyes and hair
- work, play or exercise in the sun for long periods of time
- had several blistering sunburns as a child
- take drugs that make them more sensitive to UV light





Most skin cancers start in areas that are exposed most often to the sun – the head, face, neck, hands and arms.

## Reducing Your Risk

Protect yourself and your family particularly between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are at their strongest, or any time of the day when the UV Index is 3 or more.

If you can't find shade, create your own especially between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Keep babies under 12 months out of the direct sun.

Try to plan outdoor activities before 11 a.m. or after 4 p.m.

Cover your skin to protect it from the sun.  
Choose clothing that is:

- loose fitting – like a t-shirt
- tightly woven
- lightweight



Wear a hat with a wide brim that covers your head, face, ears and neck. Hats like baseball caps won't give you enough protection.

Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) 15 or higher and SPF 30 if you work outdoor or if you will be outside for most of the day.

Look for "broad spectrum" on the label. This means that the sunscreen offers protection against both UVA and UVB ultraviolet rays. Apply sunscreen generously, at least 20 minutes before going outdoors. Reapply every 2 hours or more often if you've been swimming, or perspiring, or it's rubbed off. Use sunscreen along with shade, clothing and hats. Don't use sunscreen instead of them. Use sunscreen as a backup in your sun protection plan.

Wear your sunglasses and make sure your children wear them too. Choose sunglasses with:

- even shading
- medium to dark lenses (grey, brown or green tint)
- UVA and UVB protection



Canadian Cancer Society  
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Avoid using indoor tanning equipment. Just like the sun, tanning lights and sun lamps emit ultraviolet rays that can cause sunburn, damage skin and increase the risk of skin cancer.

Check your skin regularly. No one is completely safe from the sun. Over time, exposure to UV rays can cause skin cancer. Get to know the skin you're in and report any changes to your doctor.

