

In pregnant women, vitamin D is also produced in the skin when it is exposed to the sun. Pregnant women who do not get sufficient exposure to the sun are at risk of having low amounts of vitamin D. If pregnant women do not eat milk and margarine products fortified with vitamin D and do not take a supplement, they are at risk of deficiency. When a woman does not have enough vitamin D during her pregnancy, the baby is also at risk of having vitamin D deficiency at birth. This is another reason why the Canadian Pediatric Society suggests that all breastfed babies be given vitamin D supplementation. As well, pregnant women should consider taking a vitamin D supplement. If you have any questions about this, please speak to your dietician, pharmacist or doctor.

Can some medications make my skin more likely to burn?

Yes. Many medications, foods and herbal products may increase the risk of damage when skin is exposed to the sun. For example, many antibiotics taken by mouth and some medications applied to the skin to treat acne can increase the risk of sunburn. Also, women who are pregnant or taking birth control pills should be careful in the sun as hormones can cause a darkening of the pigmentation in the skin on the cheeks and forehead.

Speak to your pharmacist about **all** medications that you use regularly including prescription, non-prescription, herbal and natural products. Your pharmacist can recommend a sunscreen to help prevent burns and skin damage resulting from the use of these products.

How serious is skin cancer?

There are three types of skin cancer. Basal cell carcinoma is the most common type and is usually found on the face, ears, head, neck, hands and sometimes the torso. Squamous cell carcinoma is the second most common type of skin cancer. It may develop in areas that have been damaged by the sun over the years. It is most often found on the rims of ears, face, lips, mouth or back of hands.

The rarest form of skin cancer is melanoma. This type of cancer can develop anywhere on the body, but is most commonly found on the back or the back of the calf. It usually starts from a flat brown spot that looks like a mole or freckle. Watch for moles with the following features:

- A - Asymmetrical - the spot or mole is not round
- B - Border - the edge of the spot or mole is ragged, notched or blurred
- C - Colour - the spot or mole is more than one color
- D - Diameter - the spot or mole is larger than a pencil eraser (> 6 mm)

What else should I watch for?

It is important to be aware of the warning signs of skin cancer. If caught in the early stages, skin cancer is highly curable and rarely fatal. However, detecting skin cancer late can be deadly.

The Canadian Cancer Society recommends that everyone check moles, birthmarks and freckles regularly to help track changes. Watch for changes in the surface of moles including scaling, oozing or bleeding. If a spot becomes raised, itchy, tender or painful, ask your doctor or dermatologist to have a look at it. Anyone noticing a sore that does not heal or a new growth on the skin should see their doctor right away.



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FACTS ABOUT SUN EXPOSURE

With the summer months approaching, it is important to remember how to avoid too much sun exposure and prevent skin cancer.

SUN SAFETY GUIDELINES

Here is a summary of the most recent sun safety guidelines from the Canadian Cancer Society”

- Keep children < 1 year of age out of direct sunlight.
- Reduce exposure to the sun during peak hours between 11 am and 4 pm when a person’s shadow appears shorter than they are. Choose sunglasses with medium to dark lenses and UV-A and UV-B protection.
- **SLIP! on clothes to cover arms and legs.** The clothing should be tightly woven, loose fitting and lightweight.
- **SLAP! on a wide brimmed hat** because most skin cancers occur on the face or neck. Ensure that the brim is wider than a baseball hat to offer the best possible protection.
- **SLOP! on a sunscreen with at least SPF 15.** Apply the product 20 minutes before sun exposure to allow enough time for the chemicals to be absorbed. Reapply the product generously every two hours and after swimming or sweating. Use lip balm with SPF 15 and reapply when needed.
 - SPF 15 sunscreen blocks 93% of the sun’s rays. Products with SPF 30 and higher block 97% of the sun’s rays.
 - People at risk of skin cancer should use a sunscreen with an SPF higher than 15.
- Avoid the use of tanning beds as they do not provide “a safe tan” as is often claimed.
 - A tan is a sign of skin damage or injury and **no tan is safe.**

Do these guidelines also apply to children?

Yes, but the risks and benefits of using sunscreen on babies less than 6 months are unknown. Children less than six months may not have fully developed skin which can lead to different patterns of absorption of chemicals and drugs that are applied to the skin. Also, the processes that rid the body of drugs and chemicals may not be fully developed in young children. Children under 6 months should be kept out of direct sunlight in a shaded area such as under a tree, stroller canopy or umbrella

Babies less than 1 year also have very delicate skin that can burn easily. Babies are also at increased risk of dehydration. A sunburn in a child less than 1 year old can be a medical emergency so talk to your pediatrician or doctor right away if it happens.

Here are some tips for the use of sunscreen in children older than 6 months:

- Choose a sunscreen that is made for children with at least SPF 15 with UV-A and UV-B protection.
- If sun exposure results in a burn while using a product with SPF-15, change to SPF 30.
- If the child will be playing in or near water or getting wet, it is best to choose a waterproof product.
- Before applying a sunscreen to all exposed areas, test it on an area of the back to be sure there is no reaction.
- Sunscreens should be applied to all areas of the skin that will be exposed to the sun.
- Be careful when applying the product around the eyes and avoid applying it on the eyelids; Use sunglasses instead.
- For areas prone to sunburn, such as ears, nose, cheeks and shoulders, consider using a zinc oxide product that provides full sun protection.
- Work with your child's daycare to ensure proper sun protection during the day. Consider leaving a bottle of sunscreen at the daycare labelled with your child's name and authorization to use it during outside play.

Why is it particularly important to limit sun exposure for children?

People with light-coloured skin, eyes and hair are at risk of skin cancer later in life. Also, children and teens who have suffered from two or more blistering burns are at an increased risk of skin cancer when they become adults.

Are any other people at risk?

People with a family history of skin cancer and those who have spent long periods of time in the sun including work, play and exercise are also at increased risk.

Can breastfeeding women safely use sunscreen?

The World Health Organization considers the application of sun protection products that block UV-A and UV-B compatible with breastfeeding. Motherisk is an organization located at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto that conducts research on the use of drugs in pregnancy and breastfeeding. Although there are no formal studies on the use of sunscreen in breastfeeding women, Motherisk suggests that there is no reason to expect problems in an infant or child who is breastfed by a woman who applies topical sunscreen. Since the mother would be applying the product to her skin, little is expected to be absorbed into the bloodstream and little is expected to be passed to the baby through breastmilk. There are no reports of problems in infants breastfed by women using this type of product. Be sure to wash your hands well after using sunscreen so it does not get into the baby's mouth.

Can pregnant women safely use sunscreen?

Although there are no formal studies on the use of sunscreen in pregnant women, Motherisk suggests that there is no reason to expect problems in an infant born to a mother who has used sunscreen. Since the mother would be applying the product to

her skin, little is expected to be absorbed into the bloodstream therefore little is expected to be passed to the baby. There are no reports of problems in babies born to women using sunscreen on their skin.

Since we need the sun for our skin to make vitamin D, does sunscreen use affect this process?

When the skin is exposed to the sun, vitamin D is produced. In addition to food sources and supplements, sun exposure provides a major source of vitamin D. Canada is situated far enough to the north that in certain areas and at different times of year there is not enough sunlight to produce vitamin D in the skin.

Since sunscreen blocks ultraviolet light from damaging the skin, one might assume that it also blocks the production of vitamin D in the skin. Although this is a widely held belief, little evidence is available to prove that the amount of vitamin D in the body is lower in people who routinely use sun protection in the form of sunscreen or protective clothing.

What do pregnant and breastfeeding women need to know about vitamin D?

Breastmilk contains only small amounts of vitamin D, so the Canadian Pediatric Society suggests that all breastfed babies be given vitamin D supplementation daily until they are weaned from breast milk. Most babies should receive 400 IU daily; those born in northern areas (north of 55°) should be given 800 IU daily. Formula-fed infants should get enough vitamin D through infant formulas and do not usually require supplementation. If you have any questions about this, please speak to your dietician, pharmacist or doctor.

