

Sun Safety

We all need some sun exposure; it's our primary source of vitamin D, which helps us absorb calcium for stronger, healthier bones. But it doesn't take much time in the sun for most people to get the vitamin D they need, and unprotected exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays can cause skin damage, eye damage, immune system suppression, and even cancer. Even people in their twenties can develop skin cancer.

Before heading outside this summer, try taking this sun safety quiz to test your knowledge of sun exposure. The true-or-false quiz was created by Dr. Jack Leshner, chief of dermatology at the Medical College of Georgia Health System in Augusta.

1. It's OK to tan if you're wearing sunscreen.

False. Tanning indicates sun-related changes in your skin, so no tan is healthy or safe. You should use a broad-spectrum sunscreen that blocks both ultraviolet A and ultraviolet B rays and has an SPF of at least 15 (30 or higher for people with a history of skin cancer). Apply sunscreen about an hour before you go out in the sun and reapply every two hours -- more often if you're swimming.

2. You should wear sunscreen every day.

True. You should routinely use sunscreen if you're going to be exposed to the sun for more than 10 to 15 minutes. This includes driving, walking outside, or sitting in your office in front of a window. Moisturizer/sunscreen combinations or spritzable sunscreens can make daily applications a bit more convenient. Use sunscreen in the winter or on cloudy days, too, because UVA and UVA rays are still present.

3. If you have darker skin, you have natural sun protection and don't need to be worried about skin cancer.

False. Darker skin still tans, burns and is susceptible to skin cancer.

4. You need sun exposure to get adequate amounts of vitamin D.

False. It only takes five to 15 minutes of sun exposure two to three times a week on your face and hands for your body to produce sufficient amounts of vitamin D. Multivitamins, milk and some other foods are excellent sources of vitamin D.

5. You should practice safe sun habits, even if you use sunscreen.

True. Combine sunscreen with other protection such as hats or umbrellas. The sun's rays are strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., so try to stay out of the sun at that time of day.

6. It's safe to use a tanning bed.

False. Tanning beds use ultraviolet light, similar to the UVA and UVB rays emitted by the sun. The effects of UV exposure are actually intensified in a tanning bed. An hour in a tanning bed is equivalent to spending several hours in the sun.

7. Too much sun exposure causes premature aging of the skin.

True. You can see this by comparing the skin on your face and hands with skin on parts of your body that aren't regularly exposed to the sun.

Information from www.kidshealth.com and www.preventdisease.com