



SUNBURN

Definition:

Sunburn is a type of skin burn that is caused by overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun or tanning beds. This overexposure results in red skin that may sting or feel hot to the touch. Sunburns and overexposure to UV radiation can also lead to the development of skin cancers (Mayo Clinic, 2015).

Risk Factors

Melanin is a pigmented substance in the skin that helps protect the skin from UV radiation. People with lighter skin have less melanin and are therefore at a greater risk of sunburn and skin damage from UV radiation exposure. Although less prone to burns than those with lighter skin, individuals with darker skin are still at risk for skin damage from the sun. The more UV radiation that you are exposed to on a daily basis, the higher your risk of developing sunburns and skin damage (Mayo Clinic, 2015).

Signs & Symptoms

The sun can burn any part of your body including your arms, legs, ears, lips and scalp. Even your eyes can burn. You can usually feel the effects of the sunburn just hours after exposure, though depending on severity, it may take longer (Mayo Clinic, 2015). Typical signs of sunburn include (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2013):

- ◆ Red or pink skin
- ◆ Pain or tenderness at the burn site
- ◆ Swollen or blistered skin
- ◆ Skin that is warm to the touch
- ◆ Headache
- ◆ Fever
- ◆ Fatigue

After several days, the burn will start to heal, and the layers of the damaged, burnt skin will peel off. It may take up to a week for the skin to fully heal (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2013).

Treatment & Care

The main goal of caring for sunburn is to relieve pain. Sunburn remedies will not heal the skin or prevent damage, but they can make you feel more comfortable. These remedies include over-the-counter pain medications such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen, cold compresses, lotions, and aloe vera gel. Be sure to drink plenty of liquids to ensure that you stay hydrated and help your skin heal. All of these remedies aim to relieve pain and decrease the intensity of the burn. If your sunburn starts to blister, do not pop or pick at the blisters (Mayo Clinic, 2015).

Although uncommon, your doctor can prescribe medications to treat more severe sunburns. These medications include non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and corticosteroid medications. These drugs are used to relieve pain, swelling and itching caused by sunburns (Mayo Clinic, 2015).

Seek medical attention if your burn does not heal in a timely matter or if you experience any of the following symptoms (Mayo Clinic, 2015):

- ◆ Blisters on more than one part of your body, or discolored pus or drainage from the blisters
- ◆ Increasing pain, swelling or tenderness



- ◆ Continuous high fever
- ◆ Constant headaches
- ◆ Confusion
- ◆ Nausea
- ◆ Chills

Prevention

Sunburns can increase your risk of long-term skin damage, resulting in wrinkles, age spots, and even skin cancer. It can be very easy to get sunburn, but it is also very easy to prevent if you take the appropriate actions before going out in the sun. Follow these steps to avoid sunburn (Skin Cancer Foundation, 2015):

- ◆ Cover up. Wear hats, long-sleeved shirts, and pants; you can even wear special clothing that provides UV protection.
- ◆ Aim to stay out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun is the strongest. If you are

outside during this time, make sure you are covered and protected, and try to stay in the shade.

- ◆ Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from burns and damage.
- ◆ Always wear sunscreen. Use sunscreen all over your body with an SPF over 15, and reapply every two hours.
- ◆ Avoid tanning oils and bronzing gels.
- ◆ Avoid using tanning beds and artificial UV lights.

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