

Skin Cancer Prevention

Agricultural Engineering Extension: Karen Funkenbusch, Rural Safety and Health Specialist

Q & A

Questions and Answers

Q: *I am outdoors all summer and can't stay in the shade. What can I do to protect my skin?*

A: If you can't avoid the sun, you can protect your skin by wearing a wide-brimmed hat, long-sleeved shirt, and long pants. You also can wear a sunscreen and lip screen with at least SPF 15 and UVA and UVB protection. When you can, take breaks in the shade. Also, sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB offer the best eye protection. Wrap-around lenses work best because they will block UV rays from sneaking in from the side or from behind.

Q: *If I stay in the shade, should I still use sunscreen, lipscreen, and wear a hat?*

A: UV rays can reflect off of virtually any surface, including sand, snow and concrete, and can reach you in the shade. Your best bet to protect your skin and lips is to use sunscreen or wear protective clothing when you're outside --- even when you're hanging out in the shade.



Get a Hat

Q: *For the best protection, what material should I look for in a hat?*

A: A tightly woven fabric, such as canvas, works best to protect your skin from UV rays. When possible, avoid straw hats with holes that let sunlight through.

Q: *Do I need to worry about the color of my hat?*

A: The amount of shade offered by a particular hat appears to be its most important prevention characteristic. If a darker hat is an option, though, it may offer even more UV protection.

Q: *Are there recommended styles of hats for the best protection?*

A: The best way to choose a hat is to look for one that provides shade for all of your head and neck. All head sizes are not created equal. As a result, each person should choose a hat style that offers him or her the maximum coverage



Cover up

Q: *What kinds of clothing are the best to protect my skin from UV rays?*

A: Loose-fitting clothing made from tightly woven fabric offers the best protection. You should also try to keep dry; a wet t-shirt offers you much less UV protection than does a dry one.

Q: *Does protective clothing have to be a certain color?*

A: Wearing clothing made of tightly woven fabric is always a good idea, regardless of the color. Darker colors, though, may offer even more protection than lighter colors.

Q: *It gets so hot here in the summer, there's no way I could be comfortable in long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. So, what else can I do to protect my skin?*

A: Protecting yourself from the sun's UV rays doesn't have to be a major chore; it's just a matter of knowing your options and using them. Wearing at least a dry t-shirt is a good start, but it is not enough if you are going to be outside for more than a few minutes. If you can't wear long pants and a long-sleeved shirt, you can boost your protection by seeking shade whenever possible and by always wearing sunscreen with at least SPF 15, lipscreen, sunglasses, and a large brim hat.

Rub It On

Q: *What does a sunscreen's "SPF" rating really mean?*

A: Sunscreens are rated according to their effectiveness in offering protection from UV rays and then are assigned a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) number. Higher numbers indicate more protection. As a rule of thumb, you always should use a sunscreen with at least SPF 15.

Q: *Should sunscreens be reapplied throughout the day?*

A: You always should follow manufacturer directions regarding reapplication, or else you will not get the same protection from UV rays that you might think you are getting. Though recently developed sunscreens are more resistant to loss through perspiration and removal by water than previous sunscreens were, they still should be reapplied frequently, especially during peak sun hours, after swimming, or exercising.

Q: *How do sunscreens work?*

A: Most sun protection products work by absorbing, reflecting, or scattering the sun's rays. Such products actually contain chemicals that interact with the skin to protect it from UV rays.

Q: *Some cosmetic products claim to protect you from UV rays. Is this true?*

A: Cosmetics and lip protectors containing some of the same protective chemicals used by sunscreens are now on the market. Not all of these products, however, meet the standard of having at least SPF 15, and, as a result, do not offer sufficient protection by themselves.

Grab Shades

Q: *What's the best kind of sunglasses to protect my eyes from UV rays?*

A: Sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB offer the best eye protection. The majority of sunglasses sold in the United States today, regardless of cost, meet this criterion so it should not be

difficult to find a pair. Wrap-around lenses work best because they will block UV rays from sneaking in from the side or from behind.

Limit Time in The Midday Sun:

- Whenever possible limit exposure to the sun between the hours of 10AM and 4PM.

Seek Shade:

- Staying undercover is the best protection. Remember the Shadow Rule: Watch your shadow: no shadow, seek shade!

Always use sunscreen:

- Liberally apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF of 15 or greater, reapply every 2 hours.

Wear a Hat:

- A hat with a wide brim protects vital areas of face, ears, eyes, and neck.

Cover Up:

- Tightly woven loose fitting, full-length clothing offer additional protection from the sun's rays.

Wear Sunglasses:

- Choose those that block 99-100% of the UVA and UVB radiation. Fully protective glasses will reduce exposure, which can lead to cataracts.

For additional information, contact your local Outreach and Extension Center or the MU Extension Rural Safety and Health Program, 1.800.995.8503.

University Outreach and Extension does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, or status as a Vietnam-era veteran in employment or programs.

