

CANADIAN DERMATOLOGY ASSOCIATION POSITION STATEMENT SUN PROTECTION AND SUNSCREEN USE

A comprehensive sun protection strategy includes limiting time spent outdoors between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. during the summer (when ultraviolet radiation is highest), seeking shade, sunglasses, sun-protective clothing, and the use of sunscreen. Sun protection minimizes short-and long-term damage to the skin from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation, including sunburn, skin cancer, and photoaging.

Ultraviolet B radiation is most strongly linked to skin cancer and is strongest between 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. during the summer months. Therefore, sun exposure should be avoided during these times. A shade structure or equipment that effectively blocks out the majority of the ultraviolet radiation is recommended. A wide-brimmed hat that covers the ears helps reduce excessive ultraviolet radiation exposure on the face and ears. Sunglasses labeled with UV 400 block nearly 100% of harmful ultraviolet rays. Sun-protective clothing should cover as much of the trunk and extremities as possible. Dermatologists continue to recommend generously applying a water-resistant, broad-spectrum sunscreen – one that protects against ultraviolet A and B (UVA and UVB) – with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher before sun exposure. UVA in a circle on the sunscreen label denotes good UVA protection. The average adult requires approximately two to three tablespoons of sunscreen to cover the whole body, and a teaspoon to cover the face and neck. Sunscreen should be reapplied every 2 hours or sooner after swimming, strenuous exercise, sweating, or towelling off.

Sunscreen products contain one or more active ingredients — compounds that absorb, scatter or reflect ultraviolet radiation — and are regulated as over-the-counter drugs by Health Canada. Health Canada regulates the manufacturing, marketing, and safety monitoring of all sunscreen products. There are a wide range of sunscreen products on the market today. For a list of those that have been found to be sun-stable and reliably protect against both UVA and UVB, see the Canadian Dermatology Association's list of recognized sunscreen products, then choose the form (i.e. cream, lotion, spray, or balm) that you would prefer to use.

Anyone with questions about sun protection and sunscreens should speak to a Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (FRCPC) certified dermatologist, who can use their expertise to help you develop an effective sun protection plan.

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