

SUNBURN



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Redness and soreness of the skin that follows excess exposure to the sun or tanning devices.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sunburn symptoms develop 2 to 4 hours after exposure.
- Red, swollen, and (sometimes) blistered skin. Pain occurs and is worse in the first 6 to 48 hours.
- Fever, nausea, and feeling faint (sometimes).

CAUSES

Melanin, a pigment, in the skin helps to protect the skin from exposure to the ultraviolet light from the sun. When there is overexposure, the melanin is unable to keep up the protection, and sunburn occurs.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Being of fair skin, blue eyes, and red or blonde hair.
- Exposure to the sun from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- Certain drugs, soaps, or cosmetics may cause a photosensitive reaction. This causes the skin to be even more sensitive to the sun.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid the sun from noon to 3 p.m. Sunburn can occur even on cloudy days. Ultraviolet light is not blocked by thin clouds on overcast days. It is partially screened by smoke and smog. A great deal of ultraviolet light can reflect from snow, water, sand, and sidewalks.
- Use sunscreen daily. Use products with a sun-protective factor (SPF) of 15 or more. Some of these resist water and perspiration. Reapply them every 2 hours or after swimming. Baby oil, mineral oil, or cocoa butter offer no protection from the sun.
- For the best protection, use a physical barrier agent such as zinc-oxide ointment. Reapply after swimming and at frequent intervals during exposure. Barrier agents are helpful on skin areas that are more likely to burn. These include the nose, ears, backs of the legs, and back of the neck.
- Wear clothing that covers your whole body. Protect your face with a wide-brimmed hat. Wear sunglasses.
- If you feel you must get a tan, do it very gradually.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Recovery in 3 days to 3 weeks. Tanning or peeling of the skin usually occurs, depending on how severe the burn was.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Blisters may become infected.
- Years of over-exposure to the sun can lead to wrinkled, saggy and leathery skin. The risk of skin cancer is greatly increased.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- To reduce heat and pain, dip gauze or towels in cool water and lay these on the burned areas. Take cool showers.
- Soak in a tub of cool water to which an oatmeal product (Aveeno) or baking soda has been added. Pat skin dry, do not rub. Use a moisturizer to keep the skin from feeling dry.
- See your health care provider for severe sunburn or if you have other symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, or swelling. An exam of the affected area will be done and treatment prescribed for any complications.

MEDICATIONS

- Use nonprescription drugs, such as antihistamines, aspirin (not for children), or acetaminophen to help relieve discomfort.
- Ask your health care provider about using nonprescription burn remedies that contain local anesthetics such as benzocaine or lidocaine. They can produce allergic reactions in some persons.
- Drugs for pain or cortisone drugs to use briefly may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

Rest in any comfortable position until symptoms get better. Cover yourself with an upside-down "cradle" or tent of cardboard or other material. This will keep bed linens off the burned skin.

DIET

No special diet. Increase fluid intake.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You or a family member has sunburn that seems severe or there are other symptoms from sun exposure.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page