

SUN AND HEAT

If you are visiting a country where temperatures or humidity exceed what you are used to at home, take extra precautions to guard against skin damage or heat-related illnesses.

- While you are in the sun, wear light-colored, lightweight, heat-reflecting clothing which covers as much skin as possible. Fabrics such as cotton and linen are good choices. Clothes should fit loosely for maximum comfort; this will also help prevent chafing and heat rash. Wear a loose-fitting, light-colored hat with a wide brim.
- Wear sunscreen every day to prevent skin damage. Adults should use at least 2 tablespoons per application. Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or more, and reapply it if you swim or perspire. Check the label to make sure your sunscreen protects against both UVA and UVB exposure. Remember to apply sunscreen to ears and neck, and to use lip protection as well. If choosing sunscreen for a child, select one without PABA. This ingredient can cause rashes or other problems. Infants under age 6 months should never be left in direct sun.
- Try not to spend too much time outdoors between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., when the sun is strongest.
- Be extra careful about sun exposure if you are taking medication. Many common over-the-counter and prescription drugs such as antihistamines and oral contraceptives increase photosensitivity (and your risk of burning). Check the labels of all your medications for information on side effects, or ask your health care provider or pharmacist if there are precautions you should follow.
- Ultraviolet radiation from the sun increases your risk of cataracts. Where sunlight is very strong, for example at sunny beaches or ski areas, consider wearing sunglasses that have side shields and block 92-97% of visible light.
- Decrease your alcohol intake and increase your intake of other fluids.
- Stay in air-conditioned rooms and vehicles when possible.
- Relieve the discomfort of mild sunburn by bathing in cool water or applying cool compresses to affected areas, and by taking oral anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin or ibuprofen.
- Heat rash can appear as an area of raised spots or as reddened, sensitive skin. It usually forms in body areas that are not exposed to air, such as underarms and groin. Cool baths or compresses can help soothe irritated skin, and hydrocortisone cream will decrease itching.
- Heat exhaustion results from elevation of core body temperature (hyperthermia). Symptoms include dizziness, nausea, rapid pulse and headache. Treat victims immediately—take them to a cool spot where they can rest and give them plenty of liquids. If untreated, heat exhaustion can lead to heat stroke.
- Heat stroke is extreme hyperthermia, with a core body temperature of 105°F (40°C) or more. It is very serious and can be fatal. Symptoms include confusion or irrational behavior, low blood pressure or shock, vomiting, shortness of breath and unconsciousness. Cool victims as quickly as possible: remove their clothing, wet them down and fan them. If they are able to drink, give them water. Find medical help immediately.
- Elderly travelers should pay special attention to protection from heat due to an increased risk for heat stroke, even while at rest, and a decreased ability to sweat and dissipate heat. A variety of drugs commonly prescribed for older adults may also predispose them to hyperthermia.