

Sunlight and Eczema

Many people find that their eczema improves with exposure to sunlight (this is particularly true of the contact and discoid types) while others experience a worsening of their condition. Whatever your own experience, the skin will still need protection from the sun's harmful rays

The damaging effects of the sun

- * The B rays are responsible for burning.
- * The A rays can damage fibres in the lower levels of the skin, causing wrinkles and ageing.
- * The fairer your skin, the greater the chance of burning.

Short-term severe sunburn can result in :

- * blisters,
- * shivering,
- * fever.

Long-term severe sunburn can result in :

- * premature aging of the skin and skin cancers.

Protecting your skin

- * Wearing loose long-sleeved cotton tops and trousers will protect arms and legs from the sun and a wide-brimmed hat will shield the head and face even on an overcast or cloudy day, since the sun's rays will still reach you.
- * Cotton and linen are the best materials for keeping cool. Creams and lotions should be applied to protect exposed skin.

Time

- * In addition to sunscreens, it is vital to be sensible about the amount of sun exposure, particularly when on holiday.
- * Wherever you are, the sun is always strongest between 11.00am and 2.00pm.
- * Babies under 6 months should not be exposed to direct sunlight, so keep them in the shade at all times.

Moisturizing

- * Sun exposure is drying to the skin. Try to apply your emollient about half an hour before applying a sunscreen.
- * This will stop the sunscreen from becoming diluted by the emollient and will make sure that the sunscreen keeps its protective properties.
- * If you are using a moisturiser that is greasy or oily, be careful not to overdo the application of the moisturizer as this can cause a 'frying' effect.
- * A better solution may be to use a UV sun suit to minimise the need for sun creams.

Temperature control

- * Many people find that heat is a key factor in triggering their eczema.
- * Covering up in light trousers and tops will not only protect against sun exposure but will help to keep you cool.
- * Natural fibres for clothing, such as cotton or linen, are preferable to synthetic fabrics, which can make you feel hot and sweaty.

Light-sensitive eczema

- * Some types of eczema are directly caused or made worse by exposure to the sun, although this is rare. The term for this kind of eczema is photosensitive.
- * Certain drugs and chemicals such as antihistamines and antibiotics can also cause the skin to become sensitive to sunlight.
- * Therefore, if you are taking these for your eczema and are planning to spend time in the sunshine, check with your doctor

Sunscreens - basic Info

- * All sunscreens give protection against B rays.
- * Some also protect against A rays.
- * Look out for one that offers protection against both.
- * The higher the SPF, the greater the degree of protection against burning. SPF's range from 2 up to 50, but generally you should look for an SPF of at least 15.
- * Sunscreen should be applied about every two hours.
- * Water-resistant creams may be better when swimming, but should still be re-applied afterwards.
- * Chemical absorbers penetrate the skin and allow some UVA light to get to the skin but are a potential irritant.
- * Physical reflectors such as titanium dioxide reflect the UVA, UVB and infra-red rays. They do not penetrate the skin and are therefore less irritating. However, one drawback of titanium dioxide is that it tends to leave a white sheen on the skin.

Preservatives

- * Most sunscreens contain preservatives but one chemical in particular, Methyl dibromoglutaronitrile (MDBGN), may cause an allergic reaction.
- * Methyl dibromoglutaronitrile (MDBGN) is found in a number of sunscreens and has caused an increase in allergic reactions in recent years. Typical reactions are swelling, itching and acute dermatitis, which could be very painful.

Sunscreens and Eczema

- * Sunscreens can irritate eczema in some people. When choosing a sunscreen to use, you will need to consider the same factors as you would when choosing an emollient.
- * Ingredient labelled products will help you to avoid substances to which you have a known sensitivity.
- * Apply a small amount to the inside of the arm and wait 24 hours before using all over the body. If the skin becomes red and/ or itchy do not use the sunscreen, but ask your pharmacist, nurse or doctor for further advice.
- * Many sunscreens contain fragrance, so if you react to perfumes it may be a good idea to choose one that is fragrance free.
- * Try not to rub too hard when applying cream as this will set off itching.
- * Consider whether to use a sunscreen based on chemical absorbers, which can irritate eczema.
- * Remember that sunscreens are not designed to allow you to spend unlimited time in the sun but to provide protection when you are exposed to sunlight.

