

Sun Exposure and Your Skin

1. Do's and don'ts for your skin during hot and humid days



Do's:

- Apply sunscreen regularly and liberally
- Stay in the shade or in a building
- Use an umbrella or sunhat when going outdoors
- Hydrate yourself regularly
- Wear loose comfortable clothes
- See a dermatologist if your skin becomes problematic in the hot and humid weather

Don'ts:

- Suntan
- Stay in the sun unless absolutely necessary
- Scratch your skin when you develop a rash
- Self-medicate with medicated oil, toothpaste, butter or olive oil when you have a rash
- Delay medical attention. See a dermatologist right away.

2. Can the weather trigger existing skin conditions?

Certain skin conditions may be aggravated (ie they are the triggers, not the causes) by heat, and the recent warmer weather can certainly lead to a flare in some of these skin conditions. Common heat sensitive skin conditions include most forms of eczema, rosacea, "prickly heat". Individuals with skin conditions like hyperhidrosis (increased sweating) and bromhidrosis (body odour) are more likely to notice a worsening of their conditions, leading to greater social embarrassment.

3. How much sunscreen and how frequently should I apply?

For the face, the usual recommended amount of sunscreen to apply is a quarter tea-spoon or approximately 1.25ml. This is about the size of the Singapore fifty cent coin (Floral series). Most sunscreens should be applied at least every four hourly during daylight hours. For those who spend longer time outdoors or perspire easily, more frequent applications may be needed.

Two common reasons why sunscreens tend to work less well than expected are

- 1) users tend to apply about a quarter to a third of the usual recommended amount, and
- 2) infrequent re-applications.

4. What is SPF?

SPF means Sun Protection Factor. It is a measure of sun protection to ultraviolet light B (UVB). UVB is mainly responsible for sunburn. Dermatologists now recommend a minimal of SPF 30 for adequate sun protection. A SPF higher than 30 does not significantly improve the protection level.



For example, a sunscreen with a SPF 60 does not provide twice the amount of protection as one with a SPF of 30.

It is also important to protect the skin against ultraviolet light A (UVA). UVA is mainly responsible for aging skin and the development of skin cancers. A PA+++ rating is recommended for adequate UVA protection.

The most critical step, in order for a good sunscreen to work effectively, is the need for frequent re-application.

5. Do I need to apply sunscreen if my makeup products have SPF?

Some makeup products these days may contain some components of sunscreen. Using them alone as a form of sun protection is usually inadequate. This is either because the SPF and PA ratings are usually too low or people usually do not apply in sufficient quantities to achieve the level of protection as claimed in these products.



This article is written by Dr Gavin Ong, Medical Director at The Skin Specialist. He is a specialist in dermatology with many years of experience in all skin conditions and adept at managing skin conditions affecting the skin, hair and nails in both children and adults.

His main areas of interests include general dermatology, facial aesthetics and sexual health. He is able to manage conditions affecting the skin, hair and nails in both adults and children. He

6. Management of sunburn

A bland, fragrance-free moisturiser is the most effective in soothing a sunburnt skin. Chilling the moisturiser in the fridge before use can help cool down the sunburnt skin as well. In general, moisturisers (either in cream or lotion) that are recommended for use in eczema can be safely used on sunburnt skin. Avoid moisturisers heavy in fragrances as fragrances may irritate the sunburnt skin.

7. What skincare ingredients should I take note of?

A stinging sensation is a sign of skin irritation from the cream that is applied on the skin. As mentioned above, choose a bland, fragrance-free moisturiser. There are wide range of ingredients that may irritate a sunburnt skin. Avoid “moisturiser-plus”, ie moisturisers with other ingredients for added functions like exfoliation, anti-aging, anti-wrinkles or whitening etc.



8. When should you see a doctor?

If the skin rash or skin condition continues to worsen or does not resolve within a week of self-treatment, an assessment by a dermatologist is highly recommended.



performs skin surgery for skin cancers and other benign skin conditions.

Dr Ong was trained in the National Skin Centre and was a consultant dermatologist before joining The Skin Specialist, a Singapore Medical Group (SMG) clinic.

He was awarded the Ministry of Health's Health Manpower Development Award where he pursued a Fellowship in Sexual Health and HIV Medicine in

St Stephen Centre and Chelsea & Westminster Hospital in London, UK in 2013. He became the Deputy Head of the Department of STI Control (DSC). Dr Ong was also a visiting consultant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital & Khoo Teck Phuat Hospital.

