

# Sunburn

## Patient and Family Education

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**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

### What is sunburn?

Sunburn is injury to the skin caused by too much exposure to the rays of the sun or a tanning bed. Sunburn causes redness and sometimes blistering of the skin. Most symptoms do not start until 2 to 4 hours after being in the sun or under a tanning bed. The symptoms are worse after 24 hours but gradually improve in 48 hours. Some medicines may increase the risk of getting a sunburn. Repeated sunburns greatly increase the risk for skin cancer.

### How do I prevent sunburn?

- **Apply sunscreen any time your child is going to be outside for more than 30 minutes—especially between 10 AM and 3 PM in the summertime.**
- Use sunscreen, shirts with loose, long sleeves, long pants, a hat with a brim, and sunglasses.
- Protect your child's eyes with sunglasses that are ANSI approved with 95 to 100 percent UVA and UVB blockage.
- Limit times around water, sand and snow since the reflection will increase your child's exposure to the sun.
- Using only a hat or an umbrella will not protect your child from reflected rays.
- Avoid direct sun exposure for babies 6 months old and younger.
- Check the date on the sunscreen container. Do not use it if it is expired.

### Sunscreens

- Sunscreen reduces damage from UV radiation, but it does not eliminate it.
- Choose a sunscreen with an SPF rating of 30 or higher and both **UVA** and **UVB** protection.
- Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before exposure to the sun to give it time to soak into the skin. Reapply it every 2 to 3 hours.
- Give special attention to the nose, ears, cheeks and shoulders. Use a special sunscreen product for lips.
- Apply zinc oxide cream to high exposure areas, such as the nose, cheeks and shoulders.
- "Waterproof" and "water resistant" sunscreen stays on for about 30 minutes in water. Reapply it after swimming and drying off.
- Do not use a combination of sunscreen and insect repellent.
- To protect your baby younger than 6 months old from the sun:
  - It is best to keep young babies in the shade and out of the sun.
  - If your baby must be in the sun for a short time, cover his skin with lightweight clothing. Use long pants, a long sleeved shirt and a brimmed hat.
  - If you must use sunscreen, use it on small areas of the body, such as the face and back of the hands.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Sunburn, continued

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## What is the treatment?

Some general guidelines to follow include:

- Avoid further sun exposure.
- Give ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or other less costly store brand) for pain if advised by your doctor. Follow the directions on the box carefully, or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give. **DO NOT** give ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months old without talking with your child's doctor.
- Use cool compresses or cool baths several times daily for discomfort. Showers may be painful.
- Offer extra water to drink to replace the fluid lost into the swelling of sunburned skin. It can also help to prevent dehydration and dizziness.
- Avoid products containing benzocaine and alcohol.
- Sometimes, an antihistamine medicine, such as Benadryl, may be advised to help relieve the itching.

## When should I call the doctor?

Sunburn redness will increase for the first 24 hours; this is normal. Increasing redness, especially around an area of blistering after 24 hours, is **NOT** normal.

Call your child's doctor:

- For any child younger than 1 year of age with a sunburn.
- For a temperature over 100.3°F or 38°C.
- For signs of dehydration (drying out):
  - No urine in 6 hours in babies younger than 1 year old
  - No urine in more than 8 hours in a child older than 1 year old
  - No tears when crying
  - Sunken eyes
  - Dry lips and mouth
- For large or multiple areas of blistering.
- For signs of infection:
  - Increase in swelling, redness and pain
  - Drainage
  - Bad smell from damaged skin
  - Fever
- If your child is so tired and weak that he hardly responds to you.

Also, call your child's doctor if you have questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**