

# How to be SunSmart



Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. Every year over 770,000 skin cancers are treated in Australia and around 2,000 people will die from the disease.

Western Australia has the second highest rate of skin cancer in the country.

The good news is that skin cancer is largely preventable by minimising exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun.

Being SunSmart is a simple and effective way to reduce your risk of developing skin cancer.

## Who is at risk of skin cancer?

Most people living in Australia are at risk of developing skin cancer due to its geographical location in an area of high UV radiation.

You are more likely to develop skin cancer if you have:

- Fair skin that burns easily and does not tan.
- Blue or green eyes and/or fair or red hair.
- Suffered sunburn in the past, particularly as a child.
- Spent your childhood in Australia.
- A large number of freckles, moles or sunspots.
- A family or personal history of skin cancer.
- Used a solarium (sometimes called a sunbed or sunlamp), or
- Worked or spent a lot of leisure time in the sun.

## UV radiation – what you need to know

There are two types of UV radiation that reach the earth's surface - UVA and UVB. Both contribute to the development of skin cancer.

UV radiation cannot be seen by the eye like visible light or felt like infrared radiation, which produces heat.



Overexposure to UV radiation can result in:

- sunburn
- wrinkling and premature ageing
- eye damage, and
- skin cancer.





## UV myths – don't be fooled!

There are some common misunderstandings about UV radiation, including:

*'You only get burnt when it's hot'. **Not true.***

Most people get burnt when the temperature is between 18 and 27 degrees. UV radiation isn't affected by temperature. The level of UV can be the same whether the temperature is 20 degrees or 40 degrees.

*'The wind can burn your skin'. **Not true.***

'Windburn' is sunburn that happens on a windy day.

*'You can't get burnt on a cloudy day'. **Not true.***

UV radiation can penetrate cloud cover making sun protection just as important on cloudy days.

*'You won't get burnt if you're in shade'. **Not true.***

Surfaces such as sand, concrete, water, snow and grass can reflect UV radiation. Other sun protection measures (clothing, hats, sunglasses and sunscreen) should be used even when you're in the shade.

*'Only sunbathers get skin cancer'. **Not true.***

Most people get burnt when they least expect it such as when they are working in the garden or taking the dog for a walk.

# Protect yourself in five ways from skin cancer.



1. **Slip** on sun protective clothing



2. **Slop** on SPF 30 or higher sunscreen



3. **Slap** on a hat



4. **Seek** shade



5. **Slide** on some sunglasses

And remember to cover up when the UV Index reaches 3 or above.



## Slip on sun protective clothing

Use clothing rather than sunscreen to cover most of your skin, then apply sunscreen to skin that is not covered. When choosing clothes to wear outdoors consider both style and fabric.

Look for:

- Designs that cover as much skin as possible. Choose tops with long sleeves and collars and long pants or skirts.
- Materials that have a close weave. A good tip is to hold the item up to the light. If it doesn't let much light through it should provide good sun protection.

- Cotton, polyester/cotton and linen materials. They are lightweight, cool to wear and when tightly woven can protect against 95% of UV radiation.
- A UV Protection Factor (UPF), which explains how much sun protection the material provides. The higher the rating, the better the protection. A UPF of 40 or above will block more than 97% of UV radiation.
- Materials that maintain their sun protective value when wet, such as lycra. Clothes not designed for swimming, such as t-shirts, lose their ability to protect against UV radiation when wet.

Note: As clothing wears and ages it loses its sun-protective properties.





## Slop on SPF 30 or higher sunscreen

Sunscreen is recommended in addition to clothing, hats, shade and sunglasses for adequate sun protection. It should not be relied on as the sole form of sun protection. No sunscreen provides 100% UV protection.

### Did you know?

Two of the most common reasons why people get burnt is because their sunscreen wears off and/or they stay in the sun too long.

#### Remember:

- You need to reapply sunscreen approximately every two hours as it won't last all day.
- Sunscreen should never be used to increase the time you spend in the sun.

## How to choose a sunscreen

For the best protection, choose a sunscreen that:

- Has a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30 or higher.
- Is labelled 'broad spectrum'. This means the sunscreen will filter both UVA and UVB radiation.
- Is water resistant, so it is less likely to be washed off by water activities or sweat.
- Is labelled 'AUST L' or 'AS/NZS 2604:2012', showing the sunscreen meets the Australian Standard and provides the sun protection factor claimed.
- Has a valid expiry date.

More expensive sunscreens are not necessarily a better quality product.

## How to apply sunscreen

- Apply sunscreen 20 minutes before going outdoors to clean, dry skin. This will give the sunscreen time to bond to your skin.
- Layer sunscreen onto exposed skin (like icing a cake). Do not rub it in.
- Apply a thick layer of sunscreen - most people do not use enough!
- Reapply every 2 hours or more often if in the water, sweating or towel drying.
- Remember your lips (a common skin cancer site). A zinc or lip balm will provide longer lasting protection than a cream.





## Slap on a hat

Slap on a hat that provides as much shade as possible to your face, head, neck, ears and eyes.

## Choosing a SunSmart hat

There are three main styles of hats that provide adequate sun protection:

### Broad Brimmed

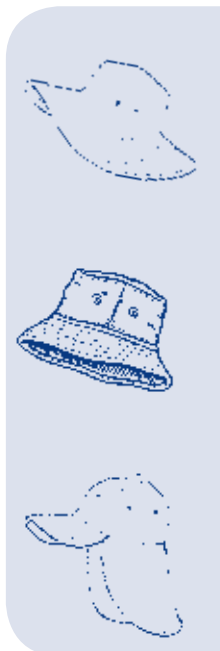
- Choose a hat with a brim of at least 7.5 cm that provides shade to the entire face.

### Bucket

- Bucket hats should have a deep crown, sit low on the head and have a brim of at least 6 cm.

### Legionnaire

- Legionnaire hats should have a peak of at least 6 cm. The side flap and front peak should meet the ears to provide protection to the side of the face.



Caps and visors are not recommended as they leave the ears and the back of the neck exposed.

Hats protect you from direct UV radiation but not from UV radiation reflected from surfaces such as sand, water and concrete. Remember to wear sunglasses as well as sunscreen on your face and neck.



## Seek shade

Staying in full shade is one of the most effective ways to reduce sun exposure, but remember that other sun protection measures (clothing, hats, sunglasses and sunscreen) should also be used to avoid reflected UV radiation.

Whatever you use for shade, be it trees, built shade structures or some form of portable shade, make sure it casts a dark shadow. You should remain in the shaded area as the shadow moves with the sun.



## Slide on some sunglasses

Sunglasses are an important way of reducing eye damage from UV radiation.

All sunglasses sold in Australia must conform to the Australian Standard AS/NZS 1067:2003 'Sunglasses and Fashion Spectacles'.

There are different categories of lenses within the Standard, and all sunglasses must be labelled to indicate which category they comply with. Those marked as 'fashion spectacles' do not provide enough UV protection.



## Choosing sunglasses

- Frames should fit close to the face.
- Wrap-around styles prevent UV radiation entering from the sides.
- Look for sunglasses that have an Eye Protection Factor (EPF) of 10 as they provide the best UV protection. The EPF number can be found on the swing tag and ranges from 1 to 10.
- Be wary of sunglasses sold as childrens' toys as these may not meet the Australian Standard.
- If you wear prescription glasses consider adding a UV protective coating, attaching protective shades or wearing prescription sunglasses.

## When to be SunSmart

Sun protection is required when the UV Index reaches 3 or above in your area. UV radiation levels are highest during the middle of the day so take extra care to be SunSmart around this time.

UV radiation levels are higher in northern Western Australia compared to southern areas of the state. In areas north of Perth, sun protection is required all year round.

A SunSmart UV Alert is issued by the Bureau of Meteorology when the UV Index is forecast to reach 3 or above. At that level, the sun can damage your skin and increase your risk of developing skin cancer.

The SunSmart UV Alert can be found at [www.myUV.com.au](http://www.myUV.com.au). It is also on the weather page of all Australian daily newspapers, the Bureau of Meteorology website at [www.bom.gov.au/uv](http://www.bom.gov.au/uv) for over 200 locations across Australia, and on some radio and mobile phone weather forecasts. The SunSmart app is also available for iPhone, iPad and Android.

## Vitamin D and sun protection – getting the balance right

In Australia, a balance is required between achieving enough sun exposure to maintain adequate vitamin D levels while minimising the risk of skin cancer.

Exposure to the sun provides most of the body's vitamin D which helps to maintain healthy bones and muscles. Most people achieve sufficient vitamin D levels from the sun exposure they receive through typical day-to-day outdoor activities, without needing to seek additional sun exposure.

Some groups in the community have a higher risk of vitamin D deficiency. They include:

- Naturally very dark skinned people who need more UV exposure to produce adequate levels of vitamin D as the pigment in their skin reduces UV penetration.
- People who cover their skin for religious or cultural reasons.
- The elderly and people who are housebound or in institutional care.
- Babies and infants of vitamin D deficient mothers, especially babies who are exclusively or partially breastfed, and
- Obese people.

See your doctor if you are concerned about your vitamin D levels.

For more information refer to Cancer Council Australia's 'Risks and benefits of sun exposure' position statement available at [www.cancer.org.au](http://www.cancer.org.au).

## Protecting children and babies

As with adults, the best sun protection for babies and children is to use a combination of shade, protective clothing, hats, sunglasses and sunscreen. Minimise the time that young children, particularly babies, spend exposed to the sun when the UV Index reaches 3 or above.

**Sunscreen should be used as a last line of defence.**

It should only be applied to areas of the skin that cannot be protected by clothing. Sunscreens are safe to use on babies however it is recommended that a small amount is tested on the skin to check for any allergies or reactions.



## **The truth about tanning**

All forms of tanning that expose your skin to UV radiation increase your risk of developing skin cancer and skin damage (including premature ageing).

Solariums (also known as sunbeds or tanning units) produce UV radiation levels up to five times as strong as the midday summer sun. Commercial solariums are now banned in Australia.

## **Early detection saves lives**

Regular skin checks increase the chance of finding skin cancer at an early and highly treatable stage. If you see a new spot on your skin, one that has changed in size, shape or colour or a non-healing sore see your doctor as soon as you can.



## **SunSmart communities**

Taking personal sun protection measures is vital but it's also important to consider ways to help make the wider community you live in (more) SunSmart.

## **SunSmart schools and childcare centres**

Is your local school or childcare centre SunSmart? UV radiation exposure during childhood and adolescence contributes significantly to lifetime risk of skin cancer.

Schools and childcare centres, in partnership with families and their communities, can have a significant role in reducing sun exposure and improving SunSmart behaviour.

## **Make your workplace SunSmart**

Workers who spend all or part of their day outside are at high risk of developing skin cancer. Cancer Council WA can advise workplaces on sun protection strategies.

## **Hosting an outdoor event?**

Ensure all participants are protected. Contact Cancer Council for tips on hosting a SunSmart event. For large outdoor events in the metropolitan area, enquire about booking the SunSmart Van which offers a range of sun protection products for sale.

For more details on any of these initiatives, contact Cancer Council WA on 13 11 20 or email [sunsmart@cancerwa.asn.au](mailto:sunsmart@cancerwa.asn.au).






## Further information and resources

For more information visit [www.cancerwa.asn.au](http://www.cancerwa.asn.au) or call Cancer Council on 13 11 20.

UV protective clothing and accessories are available at Cancer Council WA's shop at 334 Rokeby Road, Subiaco or online: [www.cancerwa.asn.au/shopping](http://www.cancerwa.asn.au/shopping)

## Be SunSmart

Protect yourself in five ways from skin cancer.

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-  2. **Slop** on SPF 30 or higher sunscreen
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**When the UV Index reaches 3 or above, be SunSmart.**

*Photos courtesy of Queensland Health*



To access any of our services, programs or information about cancer, call one of our Cancer Nurses on 13 11 20. This is a confidential service, available Statewide for the cost of a local call Monday to Friday during business hours.