

Teaching children good health habits is a crucial part of parenting — from buckling their seat belts to discussing the dangers of smoking. Making sure they protect their skin from ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun is just as important.

Kids love to play outside, and sunlight can feel good. But it doesn't matter whether it's hot or cold, sunny or cloudy:

If you can see, then there's UV!

(Have the wee ones say it with you.)

Sun exposure on unprotected skin causes damage that, over time, can lead to skin cancer. Tanning beds emit high-intensity UV light and increase the risk of skin cancer. UV damage also provokes skin problems, including redness, dark spots, broken blood vessels, blotchiness and premature wrinkles.

Being consistent about sun protection from an early age keeps skin healthy and looking its best while preventing the world's most common cancer. It's never too early or too late to start! See our advice inside, segmented by age group, and begin better skin habits today.

SUN DAMAGE FACTS

- Sun damage is cumulative, and 25 percent of lifetime exposure occurs by age 18.
- Just one blistering sunburn in childhood or adolescence more than doubles a person's chances of developing melanoma, a dangerous type of skin cancer.
- 90 percent of the two most common types of skin cancer, basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), are associated with UV exposure.
- More people are diagnosed with skin cancer each year in the U.S. than all other cancers combined.

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Kids & Sun Protection

Set up good habits for life!



Newborns to 6 Months



Avoid it: The consensus of our experts is clear: Babies need to be kept out of the sun, period. Dermatologists also advise against using sunscreen on babies under 6 months due to their delicate skin.

Keep them covered: If infants must be outside or in a car during the peak sun hours of 10 AM to 4 PM, use everything in your arsenal to protect them, including a hat, sunglasses and sun-protective clothing. Use stroller awnings, look for shade and consider UV-protective window film for home and cars.

Instruct (and remind) caregivers, too: Babysitters, day care providers and family members may mean well, but don't assume they're following your rules. Be a clear and consistent enforcer!

Model good behavior: Lay the groundwork for a lifetime of sun safety by wearing sunscreen and taking other sun-protective measures *yourself* daily. They're watching, and it's never too early to set a good example.



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Toddlers to Tweens



Establish habits: At 6 months, it's time to apply sunscreen to babies' exposed skin. Fragrance-free "physical" sunscreens, with mineral active ingredients zinc oxide and titanium dioxide, are least likely to cause a reaction in sensitive skin. Keep up with covering up, too. Introduce cool rash guards with ultraviolet sun protection (UPF), hats, sunglasses — and seek shade when available.

Get them involved: Toddlers like to feel in control, so give them choices and let them help in the application process. Little hands can grip a sunscreen stick. Let them try a makeup sponge or brush for applying lotion. While sunscreen spray is fun, make sure to avoid inhaling by spraying it into their hands and letting them rub it in.

Make it fun: Children can be squirmy. To get the job done, master the art of distraction. Sing songs, create easy-to-remember mantras (like, "If you can see, then there's UV!"), or even add a few drops of food coloring or superfine glitter to make sunscreen more exciting for little ones.

Enlist help: Talk to a director at your child's day care, school, camp or athletic facility to ensure they can enforce sunscreen application. Ask if they have shade or shade structures to provide some relief from the sun during peak hours. You may have to be proactive.

Teenagers

Make sun care part of skin care: Use a teenager's natural interest in their appearance to make the case for sun protection. Many skin-care products and cosmetics contain broad-spectrum sunscreen, and it's a good way to motivate them to wear sunscreen daily.

Be direct: Have an honest conversation about the dangers of tanning — and that there's no such thing as a "healthy tan." If your teen burns, push harder on the need for UPF clothing, hats, sunglasses and shade.

Get real about social media: Remind your teen that social media is full of retouched images, skin-enhancing filters and dangerous misinformation. Suggest board-certified dermatologists your teens can follow for accurate info. (And SkinCancer.org, of course!)

Fake it: A self-tanner is an option if teens insist on tan skin for a special event. Just make sure they still cover up and use sunscreen; a faux glow won't protect.

Just say no to indoor tanning: Stress the dangers. Just one indoor tanning session before age 35 increases the risk of developing melanoma by 75 percent. It doesn't always take decades to develop, either; we've seen cases in people in their 20s.

