



Sun-Proof Your Skin

Before summer heats up, protect yourself with skin-cancer prevention strategies—no matter what your age.

BY CELIA SHATZMAN

20s

APPLY SPF 30 SUNSCREEN EVERY DAY.

Women in their 20s are more likely than older women to get sunburned, according to one study. **Just five severe burns double your risk of melanoma** (the second most common cancer in 20-somethings). Research also shows that women in their 20s are most likely to tan, either outdoors or in tanning beds. The latter are especially dangerous: They can emit UV rays 25 times as strong as sunlight. To offset your risk, begin mole checks (see guidelines below).

SPOT CHECK

Begin monthly mole checks at age 20. Examine your entire body, including the soles of your feet (ask someone to check your back). Tell your dermatologist about any of these red flags, called the ABCDEs of melanoma:

- Asymmetry
- Borders that are uneven
- Color that is irregular
- Diameter over ¼ inch
- Evolution (any change)

Even if you don't notice any of these warning signs, see a dermatologist once a year. Go twice a year if skin cancer runs in your family.

30s

LOOK FOR SUSPICIOUS BUMPS OR PATCHES OF SKIN.

They could be signs of basal cell carcinoma (BCC). "It's the most common type of skin cancer. It used to affect people over 50, but now many of my BCC patients are in their 30s," says Arielle Kauvar, M.D., associate professor of dermatology at New York University School of Medicine. Why the change? BCC is caused by cumulative skin damage, and young people are spending more time in the sun without sunscreen. What to look for: **BCC often appears as a translucent mole with a blood vessel running through it, an open sore that won't heal, or a small patch of red irritated skin.** If you notice any of these signs, tell your dermatologist.

40+

ADD ANTIOXIDANTS TO YOUR SUNSCREEN RITUAL.

As you age, your skin becomes more susceptible to free radicals—unstable molecules that can damage skin cells, raising the risk of skin cancer. Research suggests that topical antioxidants, such as vitamins A, C, and E, can neutralize the molecules so they can't hurt your skin. **For women 40 and older the best sun protection is to apply an antioxidant before sunscreen:** Bare skin absorbs the antioxidants better, says Dr. Kauvar.

Q&a

What do I need to know about vitamin D deficiency?

A recent review revealed that many U.S. adults are deficient in D (which may guard against cancer, osteoporosis, and heart disease). Adults up to age 50 need 200 IU daily. Sunlight is the top source, but it's best to also get D from supplements and diet (3½ ounces of canned salmon has 360 IU, while 8 ounces of milk or fortified orange juice has about 100 IU).