

Slip, Slop, Slap, & Rap for Summer Fun!

By Steen Trawick, M.D.

Up to 80% of a child's lifetime skin exposure to the sun occurs in the first 20 years! There are special consideration for children and adults who are going to be in the sun, even if it is for just 20 to 30 minutes. We all need to be very protective of our skin when we are out in the sun, and not just when we are at the beach or pool during the summer, but anytime we're out in the sun for an extended period of time.

It is very important to protect yourself from the harmful rays of the sun. Those "rays" are called ultraviolet (I like to think of them as 'ultra VIOLENT') radiation. Ultraviolet Radiation or UV rays are the actual, invisible forms of the sun's radiation that can penetrate the skin and change the structure of skin cells. There are three types of UV rays: UV A, B, & C. UV rays can cause skin damage during any season or temperature, even on cloudy days!

Relatively speaking, the hours between 10 am and 4 pm are the most hazardous times for UV exposure in the United States. UV radiation is greatest during the late spring and early summer in North America.

The type of skin a person has determines whether he or she burns or tans in response to sun exposure, but contrary to popular belief, a tan is not necessarily a sign of good health. When the sun's UV rays reach the skin, this causes an increase in the production of melanin in the skin and these 'new' cells come closer to the skin's surface to reveal a tan. Many believe that a tan is a form of dead or damaged cells moving toward the surface of the skin.

This commonsense advice to avoid sun damage to your skin bears repeating:

- **Wear Sunscreen.** Most sun protection products work by absorbing, reflecting, or scattering the sun's rays. Such products contain chemicals that interact with the skin to protect it from UV rays. Sunscreens help prevent problems related to sun exposure, such as aging skin and precancerous growths. Keep in mind that sunscreen is not meant to allow you to spend more time in the sun than you would otherwise. That's why it is important to complement sunscreen use with other sun protection options: cover up, wear a hat and sunglasses, and seek shade. Sun Protection Factor (SPF) is a measure of a sunscreen's (or clothing) ability to prevent skin redness and burning. SPF can be multiplied by the time exposure necessary to create redness and burning of an unprotected individual. An example is if you develop burning in 20 minutes without sunscreen, then an SPF of 15 will help protect you for 300 minutes (20 minutes times 15 SPF.) Always wear sunscreen that protects you from UVA and UVB rays. SPF of 15 or higher! Apply early (at least 20 minutes before exposure) and often! Remember that even waterproof sunscreens don't last forever, especially if your child is playing hard and sweating or swimming! Re-apply often!

- **Take special care with infants.** Keep them out of the sun. Keep their skin covered with light clothing. Use a sunscreen on infants no matter how young. Stay between an SPF of 8 and 15 and make sure that it is “PABA free” to help limit allergic reactions.
- **Wear clothing and hats** that protect against the direct radiation of the sun.
- **Watch out for freckles.** They may be cute on children, but if you see them, enforce the wear a hat rule and use sunscreen!
- **Self Tanning Lotions** produce a safe sun tan that looks good, but will not protect your skin from the sun’s harmful radiation. Use sunscreen!

Remember to **SLIP** on a T-Shirt, **SLOP** on some sunscreen even under clothing, **SLAP** on a hat, and **Rap** on some sunglasses. This is the recipe to healthy skin and having lots of FUN this summer.

(Dr. Trawick is a hospitalist at CHRISTUS Schumpert Sutton Children’s Medical Center and CHRISTUS Schumpert Health System.)