

## Sunburn (Sun Poisoning)

Like most people, you may have been sunburned at least once. If so, you know the symptoms—red, hot, painful skin. Most sunburns are minor and go away in a few days. But sunburns can be serious, so it's important to know when to get medical care.

### Risk Factors

You are more likely to burn in the sun if you:

- Have very fair skin.
- Are exposed to sunlight reflected from snow or water.
- Live near the equator or at high altitudes.
- Are taking antibiotics, birth control pills, Accutane, or the herb St. John's wort.



Apply plenty of sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher. Reapply it often.

### When to Go to the Emergency Room (ER)

The symptoms of a sunburn may not appear until 6 to 12 hours after exposure. Mild redness and swelling can often be treated at home. Cool baths or compresses, along with aloe vera lotion, can help. Oral ibuprofen can help relieve swelling and inflammation. Go to a hospital emergency room if you have any of these symptoms:

- Intense pain
- Fever and chills
- Severe blisters
- Headache, confusion, or fainting
- Nausea or vomiting
- Severe dehydration (fluid loss)

### What to Expect in the ER

The treatment you receive will depend upon the severity of the sunburn.

- For mild burns, you may be told to drink plenty of fluids and apply cool compresses or soak in cool water. You may also be given a cream to prevent infection.
- For severe burns, you may be given pain medication. You may be given oral steroid medication to take. Fluids and cool water soaks help relieve symptoms. In extreme cases, you may be admitted to the hospital burn unit.

### Protect Your Skin from the Sun

Long-term sun exposure may lead to wrinkling and skin cancer. To protect your skin:

- Avoid the sun between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., when rays are strongest.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat and long sleeves in the sun.
- Use sunscreen of at least SPF 15, even on cloudy days.