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Stay Safe in the Sun - *What Everyone Should Know*

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Sun Awareness Week is a timely reminder that while sunshine is good for the soul, it pays to be informed about how to enjoy it safely. The UK may not be known for scorching summers, but sun damage can happen even on cloudy days - and the effects can build up over a lifetime without us noticing. The good news is that a few simple habits can make a real difference, both to your immediate comfort and your long-term health.

Why Sun Safety Matters

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the UK, with over 100,000 new cases diagnosed every year. The vast majority are caused by overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation, from the sun or from sunbeds. The encouraging news is that it is also one of the most preventable cancers, and when caught early, survival rates are high.

UV rays don't take a day off. They're present year-round, can penetrate cloud cover, and reflect off surfaces like water, sand and even pavements. That means sun protection isn't just a summer holiday consideration - it's a year-round habit worth building.

Did you know? In the UK, UV levels are strong enough to cause skin damage between March and October - even on overcast days.



Protecting Your Skin The Basics Done Well

Use sunscreen - and use it properly:

Choose a sunscreen with at least SPF 30 and a 4 or 5-star UVA rating. Apply it generously 15 to 30 minutes before going outside, and reapply every two hours - more often if you're swimming or sweating. Most people apply far less than they need to, which significantly reduces its effectiveness.

Cover up where you can: Lightweight, long-sleeved clothing, a wide-brimmed hat and UV-protective sunglasses offer excellent protection without relying solely on sunscreen. Shade is your friend - especially between 11am and 3pm when UV rays are at their strongest.

Be extra careful with children: Children's skin is more sensitive to UV damage, and sunburn in childhood significantly increases the risk of skin cancer later in life. Keep babies under six months out of direct sunlight entirely, and make sun protection a non-negotiable part of the routine for older children.

Avoid sunbeds: Sunbeds emit UV radiation that can be more intense than midday sun. There is no safe level of sunbed use - they increase the risk of skin cancer, including melanoma.



Quick tip: Check the UV index before you head outside. When it's 3 or above, sun protection is recommended. Most weather apps now include this information.

Knowing Your Skin – What to Look For

Getting to know your skin is one of the most powerful things you can do for your health. Most moles and skin changes are completely harmless, but it's important to know what to look out for.

Use the **ABCDE rule** when checking your skin:

- **A - Asymmetry:** One half doesn't match the other.
- **B - Border:** Edges are irregular, ragged or blurred.
- **C - Colour:** Uneven shading, multiple colours or unusual tones.
- **D - Diameter:** Larger than 6mm, roughly the size of a pencil eraser.
- **E - Evolving:** Any change in size, shape, colour or a new symptom like bleeding or itching.

Any mole or patch of skin that is new, changing or simply doesn't look right is worth getting checked. Don't wait and see - early detection makes an enormous difference to outcomes.

Check your whole body - including your scalp, between your toes and the soles of your feet. Skin cancer can develop in places that rarely see the sun.

The Benefits of Sunshine - In the Right Dose

It's worth remembering that sunshine isn't the enemy. Sensible sun exposure plays an important role in our health and wellbeing.

Vitamin D production: Sunlight is our primary source of vitamin D, which is essential for healthy bones, a strong immune system and good mood regulation. In the UK, most people need to top up their vitamin D through diet or supplements during the winter months when sunlight is too weak to trigger production.

Mood and mental health: Sunlight increases serotonin levels in the brain, helping to lift mood and reduce feelings of anxiety and low mood. Time spent outdoors in natural light is consistently linked to better mental health and improved sleep patterns.

The key is balance - enjoying the sun sensibly, rather than avoiding it altogether.



Making Sun Safety a Habit

Small changes add up. Here are a few easy ways to build sun awareness into your daily routine:

- Keep a bottle of sunscreen by the door as a daily reminder.
- Reapply after lunch if you're spending time outside.
- Schedule a monthly skin check - pick a date that's easy to remember.
- Talk to your children about sun safety so it becomes second nature.
- See a clinician promptly if you notice any skin changes that concern you.

When to Seek Help

If you notice a new or changing mole, an unusual patch of skin, or anything that simply doesn't look right, don't put it off. Early action is always the right action.



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