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How to prevent sunburn

We now know that exposure to the sun is bad for children's health, leading to sunburn, premature skin aging, cataracts, and, most frightening of all, skin cancer. The good news is that minimizing exposure to ultraviolet radiation during the first 20 years of life greatly decreases the risk of skin cancer. By using sunscreen, wearing proper clothing, and taking other precautions, your child will be protected against the damaging effects of the sun's rays. Here's what to do:

- Limit your child's exposure to the sun, especially between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Follow the shadow rule and teach it to your child--seek shade when your shadow is shorter than you are tall.
- Have your child wear protective clothing--a hat, a long-sleeved shirt, and long pants in a closely woven fabric.
- Avoid using sunscreens in children younger than 6 months of age. Instead, use protective clothing and a carriage with a hood or canopy
- Use sunscreens from May through September.
- Apply sunscreen, including lip balms, daily.

The products should have a minimum SPF of 15 and provide UVA and UVB protection (check the label). It's best to apply the sunscreen 30 to 45 minutes before the child goes outside. Reapply at least every two hours if the child remains in the sun, or earlier after swimming, toweling, or perspiring heavily. Lip balms also should be reapplied frequently. Make sure you apply the sunscreen thickly, as the label directs

- Protect the child's eyes with sunglasses that provide 99% to 100% of UVA and UVB protection. Large, framed, wraparound sunglasses are best.
- Use extra protection when your child is near sand, snow, concrete, or water, which can reflect up to 85% of the sun's damaging rays. Also use extra protection at high altitudes. For every 1,000 feet above sea level, radiation increases 4% to 5%.
- Take precautions even on cloudy days, when up to 80% of ultraviolet radiation can penetrate the atmosphere.
- Make sure your child avoids artificial tanning devices.
- Examine your child's skin regularly for redness or blistering and for new or changing moles.
- Set an example for your children by faithfully adhering to these sun protection guidelines.

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