

Sun savvy

Basking in the warming sunlight enhances health and happiness, provided we don't get burnt. Prevent, recognise and repair sun damage for an endless summer.

IT'S no wonder all ancient cultures worshipped the sun in some form. The sun gives us light and heat to cultivate crops for energy. Without sufficient sun, our moods darken and diseases increase. The sun triggers serotonin which gives calm clarity and releases melatonin for sleep. Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) can set in without sunlight. Sunshine also supports vitamin D production which is vital for vision, healthy bones, type 2 diabetes management, and immunity.

A little sun is also considered a cancer preventive as those living in low daylight areas are more prone to cancers of the colon, kidney, ovaries, pancreas and prostate. Skin conditions like acne, eczema, jaundice and psoriasis often benefit from sunbathing or phototherapy. Inflammatory conditions, including rheumatoid arthritis, IBS and thyroiditis, also benefit from moderate sun exposure. Fun in the sun also lowers blood pressure as it dilates blood vessels which shunts nitric acid stored in skin into the bloodstream. A bit of sunlight reduced Alzheimer's patients' agitation, depression and insomnia in several studies.

WHO recommends getting 5-15 minutes sunlight on arms, hands and face 2-3 times a week. If you're fair-skinned, three minutes a day is enough but very dark-skinned people need more. The yogic practice of sun gazing activates

the pineal gland which increases energy, insight and eyesight. Gaze at the rising sun without glasses or contacts for a minute and build up to 15 minutes over 15 days. If the sun is too bright, squint, gaze around the sun or view it through your hands raised in a triangle shape.

Slip, slop, survive

Does it make sense to protect from harmful UV rays with harmful sunscreens? Instead of swapping one hazard for another, opt for safer sun protection. Take antioxidants to decrease sun damage from inside out. These include selenium, astaxanthin, berries, cabbage, carrots and kale. Nicotinamide, chaga mushroom and Polypodium leucotomoides fern also protect against UV rays. One rule is to avoid direct sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when UV rays are strongest. Wear a broad-brimmed hat and long clothing that's thick enough to block UV rays. Also sport sunglasses that block UV rays. Before sun exposure, never apply retinol or essential oils that increase photosensitivity, such as bergamot, grapefruit, lemon, lime and orange. Apply sunscreen 20 minutes prior to sun exposure and reapply every two hours or after swimming. Patch-test sunscreen on your inner forearm or under your jawline prior to usage. Store sunscreen below 30 degrees.

The safest sunscreens offering physical barrier protection from UVA and UVB rays are non-nano zinc oxide and non-nano titanium dioxide. The jury is out on whether nanoparticles are safe and the TGA doesn't require labels warning consumers about nanoparticles in sunscreen. It's best to contact the product manufacturer to confirm that no nanoparticles are used. Australia's TGA has ruled that mineral components can't be labelled certified organic

* Monitoring moles

The outdoor Aussie lifestyle and high UV levels means we have one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. At least 2 in 3 Australians will be diagnosed with some form of skin cancer before age 70. Those considered high risk have multiple moles/freckles, fair skin that burns easily, light-coloured eyes, sun damage, a family history of skin cancer and extensive sun or solarium exposure.

Non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC) is the most common cancer in Australia and can be treated in doctors' surgeries or naturally with black salve. Melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer and has three types -nodular melanoma, basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma. Over 9% of melanoma cases are diagnosed in people aged under 40 years old, 11% in those aged 40-49, 18% in those aged 50-59, 25% in those aged 60-69, 20% in those aged 70-79 and 16% are aged 80 and over. Along with annual check ups, scan your skin for any spots as early detection increases the odds of a positive prognosis. Ideally get a trusted person to check your back. Stand naked in good light in front

of a mirror and observe any pigmented or raised areas on. A guide to detection is the acronym ABCDE: A is for asymmetry of spots; B is for a border that's spreading or with an irregular edge; C is for colour that is blotchy with different tones, such as blue, black, red, white or grey; D is an increase in diameter; and E is for spots evolving into a different appearance. Australia's Cancer Council advises to look out for:

- moles that increase in size
- an outline of a mole that becomes notched
- a spot that changes colour from brown to black or is varied
- a spot that becomes raised or develops a lump within it
- the surface of a mole becoming rough, scaly or ulcerated
- moles that itch or tingle
- moles that bleed or weep
- spots that look different from the others

The good news? Skin cancer treatment has a high success rate and there are effective approaches to prevent and repair sun damage.

because it isn't grown; however, equivalent products from overseas can be labelled organic according to the country of origin's labelling legislation. Avoid chemical constituents, including oxybenzone, avobenzone, octisalate, and homosalate, as these act as allergens and hormone disruptors. Chemical sunscreens also kill our coral and poison our pool or seawater. Dermatologists advise sunscreen be the final step in a skincare routine to ensure other products don't dilute its action. However, applying it under mineral make-up is effective as this contains a natural SPF. To make your own sunscreen, add 2 tablespoons non-nano zinc oxide to 1 cup of your own favourite moisturiser, oil or serum.

Turn back time

Years of sun can lead to pigmentation, premature ageing and skin cancer. Dermatologists and beauticians have a bevy of peels, exfoliants, lasers and lotions to reverse sun damage and restore youthful luminosity and elasticity. Home treatment devices are another option, such as fruit or mandelic acid peels, personal microdermabrasion devices, nicotinamide, collagen-promoting potions, microneedling and LED light therapy. 📺

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Natural oils with a high SPF include carrot seed oil (35-40) and red raspberry seed oil (25-60.)

