



4905 5th Ave. Fort Rucker, AL 36362-5363
Comm. (334) 255-3770 • Fax (334) 255-2266
<https://safety.army.mil>

Sun safe

Moderation, coverage, hydration keys to safe sun exposure

By Mollie Miller

U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center

Sun worshipers have long been chastised for spending too much time basking in the warm rays but a recent study indicates that their days in the sun may not have been a total mistake.

American researchers comparing results from 1988-1994 and 2001-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found that the average vitamin D level has dropped significantly and attribute some of the decline to the fact that people are spending less time in the sun.

Vitamin D, which plays an important part in bone health, is produced by the body during periods when the skin is exposed to the sun.

So, sun exposure is necessary for good health but how do you get the sun you need without putting yourself at risk for a variety of sun-related illnesses and injuries?

Safety officials at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center have said the key to safe sun exposure is moderation and an understanding that when it comes to sun safety, what you put inside your body is often just as important as what you put on the outside.

Outside

Officials at the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (CHPPM) said the key to keeping skin safe in the sun begins at least 15 minutes before stepping out of the house. Sun screen with a minimum Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 30 should be applied 15 to 30 minutes before going into the sun.

“People should wear sun screen lotion at all times and reapply if they have been in the water or have been sweating,” Lt. Col. Dana Renta, Deputy Commander for Clinical Services at Lyster Army Health Clinic at Fort Rucker, Ala., said. “Also, it is important to avoid being in the sun from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. when the (sun) is the strongest.”

When applying sun screen, it is important to use enough and remember to cover face, lips, hands, forearms, shoulders, ears, back of neck, under chin, and the top of head.

Clothes also act as a good barrier from the sun’s rays. Renta suggests those who will be out and about this summer dress in loose fitting, light colored long-sleeved shirts and pants with a wide-brimmed hats.

Officials at CHPPM said that even if temperatures seem too hot for long sleeves and pants, long shorts, T-shirts and beach cover-ups will still provide at least some measure of protection as long as they are worn in conjunction with a high SPF sun screen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays.

Inside

Medical professionals have long agreed that hydration and good nutrition are important parts of summer sun safety and integral to avoiding sun and heat-related injuries. It is recommended that people consume eight 8 ounce glasses of water, not tea or soda, every day. During hot summer days, it is important to avoid alcoholic drinks and drinks containing caffeine because these drinks could actually adversely affect a body's ability to stay hydrated in the heat.

When having fun in the sun this summer, USACR/Safety Center officials advise everyone think about three important factors – where you are, what you are putting in your body and what you are putting on your body. Remember, this quick risk assessment could save a life.

For more information about sun safety, visit www.cdc.gov. For more information about the Army's Safe Summer Campaign, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

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SIDEBAR/INFO BOX

Too much sun – now what?

- Cool bath
- Unscented moisturizer (lotion, no petroleum jelly)
- Hydrocortisone cream
- Drink water
- Get out of the sun

*If a burn is severe and accompanied by a headache and chills or a fever, see a doctor.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



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