

SUNBURN

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

3.1

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation of the skin that follows after over exposure to the sun, tanning beds or occupational light sources. There is no such thing as a healthy tan.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Red, swollen, painful and sometimes blistered skin.
- Fever, chills or dizziness.
- Nausea and vomiting (severe burns).
- Delirium (severe, extensive burns).
- Tanning or peeling of the skin after recovery, depending on severity of the burn.

CAUSES

Excess exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light. The UV rays are not screened out by thin clouds on overcast days, but it is partially screened by smoke and smog. A great deal of ultraviolet light reflects from snow, water, sand, and sidewalks.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Genetic factors, especially fair skin, blue eyes, and red or blonde hair.
- Some medications can increase the risk of sunburn such as: antibiotics, topical acne medications, etc.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid the sun from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Use a sun-block preparation for outdoor activity. Products with a sun-protective value of 15 or more are recommended. For maximum effectiveness, apply 15 minutes prior to sun exposure. Some of these resist water and perspiration, but reapply them after swimming or after prolonged exposure. Baby oil, mineral oil or cocoa butter offer no protection from the sun and may increase the risk of sunburn and subsequent skin damage possibly leading to skin cancer.
- For maximum protection, use a physical-barrier sunblock such as zinc-oxide ointment. Reapply after swimming and at frequent intervals during exposure. Barrier agents are especially helpful on skin areas that are most susceptible to burns, such as the nose, ears, backs of the legs and the back of the neck. Lip balm with SPF 15 or higher is recommended.
- Wear protective clothing, including a hat and sunglasses.
- Be aware that sunburn can occur on cloudy days.

- There are many over-the-counter products that are combination lotion, sunscreen, and self-tanners.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Spontaneous recovery in 3 days to 3 weeks, depending on the severity of the sunburn.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Skin damage. Sun exposure is cumulative over a lifetime and can lead to skin cancer.
- Premature wrinkling and loss of skin elasticity.
- Cataracts

GENERAL MEASURES

To reduce heat and pain, dip gauze or towels in cool water and lay these on the burned areas. For tender or badly blistered skin, apply aloe vera based gel. Soak in a tub of cool water with colloidal oatmeal (Aveeno) or baking soda. Pat skin dry, do not rub.

MEDICATION

Use non-prescription drugs, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen, to relieve pain and reduce fever. Non-prescription burn remedies that contain local anesthetics, such as benzocaine or lidocaine, should NOT be used as it may cause allergic reactions.

ACTIVITY & DIET

Rest in any comfortable position until fever and discomfort diminish. Cover yourself with an upside-down "cradle" or tent of cardboard or other material to keep bed linens off the burned skin. No special diet. Increase fluid intake.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- Oral temperature rises to 101°F (38.3°C).
- Pain and fever that persist longer than 48 hours or is unrelieved by over the counter medication.
- The burn produces large areas of blisters.
- Vomiting, diarrhea or delirium.

References:

www.medicinenet.com/sunburn_and_sun_poisoning/article.htm

Student Health Center

WWW.SHC.SIUC.EDU

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.



618-453-3311

For after hours emergencies call 911 or go to the emergency room.