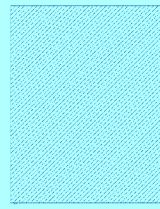




Recent research also suggests that sun exposure may be protective for many kinds of cancer. Living in areas with reduced sun exposure increases the risk of dying from Hodgkin's lymphoma, as well as breast, ovarian, colon, pancreatic, prostate, and other cancers, as compared with living in areas with greater sunlight exposure.

Is there a one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to tanning and sun exposure? Probably not. Everyone should take precautions to avoid sunburn, which may mean something different for a fair-skinned redhead than an olive-skinned brunette. Have any suspicious moles checked out by a qualified health professional, or make a skin screening part of your routine preventive care — especially if you're at higher risk. Even so, 15 to 30 minutes of unprotected sun exposure can be quite beneficial for most people. After that, enjoy some shade, use a natural sunscreen from your local health food store, or wear protective clothing and a wide-brimmed hat. Using a common sense approach that balances the risks and benefits of sun exposure will have you loving the sun again. ●



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...use very high UV sunscreens on most people's skin. Indeed, excessive tanning and sunburns do increase the risk of basal cell carcinoma, the most common and curable form of cancer in the United States. About half of Americans who live to the age of 65 will have this cancer, which is generally easily treated with outpatient surgery or other relatively mild interventions. Melanoma, which is more rare but also more dangerous, is associated with a history of blistering sunburns and excessive sun exposure. About 1 in 50 people will experience melanoma in their lifetime. And though melanoma, too, is highly curable in the early stages, its rates have been rising.

Skin cancer is a real threat, but that doesn't mean that the sun must be avoided at all costs. Sun exposure is necessary for optimal health. Sunlight plays a role in reducing the risk of several diseases, often through its ability to trigger vitamin D production in the skin. Vitamin D is important to many bodily functions, including building bones, regulating cellular proliferation and differentiation, supporting immune function, and influencing insulin synthesis. The amount of vitamin D we absorb from the sun is affected by many factors, including the time of year, the angle of the sun, and your skin color. At the height of summer, we can absorb as much as 50,000 IU's of vitamin D in as little as a half hour.

Unfortunately, our shunning of the sun means that many of us are not getting enough Vitamin D or the other benefits associated with being in sunlight. Childhood sun exposure is protective against multiple sclerosis later in life. Sunlight has been shown to improve mood, especially in cases of seasonal affective disorder (SAD). There is some evidence that type 1 diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and Parkinson's disease are more common in the northern latitudes with reduced sun exposure.