

Media Release

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Cancer Council research shows sun mistakes putting Aussies at risk

With the UV index at extreme levels and many Australians aiming to beat the nationwide heatwave, Cancer Council Australia is reminding Australians to be vigilant about their sun protection, with new data showing we are making simple mistakes when it comes to protecting ourselves from sunburn.

The latest data from the National Sun Protection Survey has shown that nearly 40% of adults who have been sunburnt said it was because they stayed in the sun too long and one in three reported they have been burnt because they either forgot to use sun protection or didn't think they needed it.

Furthermore, one in 10 Australians also adapted their sun protection habits due to the misguided belief they needed more vitamin D.

Craig Sinclair, Prevention Advisor, Cancer Council Australia said, "Two in three Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer in their lifetime and these results show that we still have a long way to go when it comes to protecting ourselves from the sun."

"With nearly 40% sunburnt adults saying staying in the sun too long was their reason for sunburn, it is important to remember no sunscreen is a suit of armour and it should never be used to extend your time in the sun. During summer, when UV levels are extreme, you should plan activities for earlier in the morning or in the evening, when UV levels are generally lower and always make sure you adequately protect yourself."

"Adequate sun protection means using five measures of sun protection: slip on protective clothing, slop on minimum SPF30 broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen, slap on a broad-brimmed hat, seek shade and slide on wrap-around sunglasses," Sinclair explained.

27% of people also reported they were sunburnt because they forgot to reapply their sunscreen, didn't use enough sunscreen or missed a spot.

"The average-sized adult needs around a teaspoon of sunscreen for their head and neck, each limb and for the front and the back of the body. That is about 35ml (7 teaspoons) of sunscreen for one full body application. It should be applied 20 minutes before you go outside and re-applied again every two hours or after swimming or towel-drying.

"Often, it's times when we might not think about sun protection, such as when it's cloudy or when we are doing incidental activities like gardening, where we get caught out so it's important that people keep protecting themselves from the sun front of mind this summer," Sinclair said.

When it comes to Vitamin D, the results of the survey showed women were more likely than men to try to get more vitamin D, with 16% saying they adapted their sun protection to get more vitamin D, compared to 9% of men.

"The average Australian will get enough vitamin D in summer in a matter of minutes through everyday activities, such as hanging out washing, grabbing a coffee or walking to the car.

Research has shown prolonged sun exposure does not cause vitamin D levels to continue to increase - but it does increase the risk of skin cancer.”

ENDS

For media enquiries please contact Tegan Brown via the Cancer Council Australia media line: (02) 8063 4109 (diverts to mobile outside of business hours) or media@cancer.org.au

Recommendations

Keep an eye on local UV levels – you can get your local UV alert by downloading the SunSmart app – cancer.org.au/SunSmartApp

When the UV Index is 3 or above (summer across Australia and in some parts of Australia with high year-round UV levels)

- Skin cancer prevention should remain a priority, even for those with Vitamin D deficiency – deliberate and extended unprotected sun exposure when UV levels are 3 or above is not recommended.
- Sun protection (including hats, sunscreen, clothing, shade and sunglasses) should be used when UV levels are 3 or above when heading outdoors for more than a few minutes.
- A few minutes of mid-morning or mid-afternoon sun exposure to arms and hands on most days of the week should be sufficient to maintain adequate Vitamin D.

UV below 3 (Late Autumn and Winter in some parts of Australia)

- Sun protection is not necessary unless near snow or other reflective surfaces.
- To support Vitamin D production, spend time outdoors in the middle of the day with some skin uncovered.
- Being physically active outdoors – e.g. gardening or going for a brisk walk, will help boost vitamin D levels.

For those at risk of Vitamin D deficiency

- Talk to medical practitioner to determine whether vitamin D supplementation rather than sun exposure is appropriate.

Outdoor workers

- Outdoor workers should use sun protection throughout the year regardless of the UV Index, as they have an increased risk of skin cancer

Results

Adults’ summary of self-reported reasons for sunburn (%)

	Sunburnt adults N=598
Sunscreen wore off, burnt through sunscreen, or missed area when applying	27
Stayed in the sun too long on a sunny/hot day	37

Didn't think needed to protect or forgot the protect	33
Didn't use or wear sun protection	17
Could not be bothered or trying to get a suntan	11
Other	8
Can't say	1

Other category includes burnt through clothing (1%), glare/reflection (2%), skin sensitivity (1%), wind burn (1%), other (3%).

NOTE: Multiple responses allowed.

Adults vitamin D behaviour (%)

	Overall N=3614	Male	Female
Changes to sun protection to get more vitamin D (yes)	13	9	16