

# Sun Fitness for All Ages

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Sun Fitness for All Ages



 THE SKIN CANCER FOUNDATION

**Y**ou're never too young or too old to be harmed by the sun. This may sound strange to you, because without the sun's warming rays, life on earth could not exist. But the sun is both friend and foe. It is responsible for more than 90 percent of all skin cancers, which are now occurring at the epidemic rate of more than a million new cases a year in the United States. The sun can also age your skin before its time.

That's why sun protection is a vital part of your physical fitness program. Yet even people who protect their hearts with aerobic exercise and diet and strengthen their muscles by weight-lifting often fail to recognize that practicing sun safety has comparable beneficial effects on the skin. To a large extent, the firmness and health of your skin depends on how well you follow sun-protective techniques throughout your life.



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## Sins of the Sun

There's no denying that sunshine can make you feel good, giving you a sense of warmth and well-being. People tend to be more cheerful on sunny days. However, virtually all the effects of exposure to the sun's long-wave and short-wave ultraviolet rays (UVA and UVB) are damaging to the skin. In addition, the sun's rays can harm the inner structure of the unprotected eye, causing cataracts.

The closer you are to the equator and the higher in altitude, the greater the hazard from the sun. But no matter where you live, the sun's rays are more intense when they bounce off sand, water, snow, concrete, and other reflective surfaces. What's more, you're not free from solar exposure on overcast days, since 70 - 80 percent of UVA and UVB rays pass right through clouds and haze.

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## Losing Big: Skin Cancer

The two most common forms of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma. These can lead to disfigurement and loss of an eye, ear, or nose if left untreated, but are curable if caught in time. Melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer, is increasing at a rate faster than that of any other cancer. But even this life-threatening disease is curable if detected and effectively treated in the earliest stage.

## What's Your Risk?

Two people living in the same area and exposed to the same amount of sunlight do not run the same risk of skin damage and skin cancer. The difference largely depends on skin color.

The greatest risk is for individuals who have fair skin that burns but doesn't tan; freckles; blond, red, or light brown hair; and blue, green, or gray eyes. Skin cancers are less common in darker-skinned people, including Hispanics, native Americans, Asians, and those of African descent, because their skin contains more of the protective pigment melanin. But even people who are dark-skinned can get skin cancer and should limit their sun exposure. No one is immune to the sun's harmful rays.

You are at increased risk of developing melanoma if you have a large number of common moles or any atypical moles. Also known as dysplastic nevi, atypical moles are wider than a pencil eraser, unevenly shaped, and/or irregularly colored. You are also at increased risk if you had a previous melanoma or have a family history of the disease. If you are in any of these categories, you need to be especially vigilant in practicing sun protection.

## Know the Signs of Skin Cancer

The best guarantee of finding a skin cancer early is regular skin self-examination. The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends that, in addition to an annual professional skin examination, you do a head-to-toe self-examination at least once every three months. Call a doctor immediately if you see any of these warning signs:

- A skin growth that increases in size and appears pearly, translucent, tan, brown, black, or multicolored.
- A mole that changes in color or in texture, becomes irregular in outline, increases in size or thickness, or is greater than 1/4" in diameter—about the size of a pencil eraser.
- A spot or growth that continues to itch, hurt, crust, scab, erode, or bleed.
- An open sore that persists for more than four weeks, or that heals and then reopens.
- A new mole that appears after age 21.



## A Lifetime of Sun Fitness

The basic tenets and techniques of sun protection are applicable whether you're young or old. But there are special concerns for every age group. Following a lifetime sun fitness program will help you enjoy the outdoors while keeping your skin healthy.

### Babies

Infants under six months old should never be exposed to the sun. Their skin is not yet adequately protected by melanin.

Especially avoid sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when UV rays are the most intense. Whenever you do go outside, take precautions. First, cover your baby's super-sensitive skin with proper protective clothing, including tightly-woven long-sleeved shirts, long-legged pants, and a wide-brimmed sun bonnet. Also, be sure to use a carriage or stroller with a canopy or hood. If you want to sit outside, find a shady spot or put up a sun umbrella.

When your baby is six months old, you can start using sunscreen. Choose a waterproof product that is moisturizing rather than alcohol-based and that has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or greater. Apply it liberally all over the body about half an hour before sun exposure. Reapply as directed on the package.



### Children

The average child spends a lot more time outdoors than does the average adult and is exposed to three times more ultraviolet radiation in a year. Most people receive the majority of their lifetime sun exposure by the age of 18, setting the stage for skin cancer later in life. Research shows that regular use of an SPF 15 sunscreen throughout childhood and adolescence could reduce the risk of most common skin cancers by almost 80 percent.

A single severe, blistering sunburn in childhood may double one's lifetime risk of developing melanoma. Under any circumstances, a sunburn in a small child is a serious matter: Call your doctor if your child has severe pain, lethargy, blistering skin, or a temperature over 101° F. Better yet, prevent sunburn by practicing sun safety measures.

As the years go by, continue to use your influence as a parent:

- When your toddler goes to nursery school or a play group, provide sunscreen and ask the staff to apply it.
- Urge athletic coaches and school administrators to schedule sports events before 10 a.m. or after 4 p.m.
- Support community programs to plant trees and construct shaded areas in schools and playgrounds.
- Instruct older children to reapply sunscreen themselves before joining in outdoor games or after swimming.

Sun safety habits developed in childhood last a lifetime. Remember to practice sun protection on yourself. *You are your child's most important role model.*

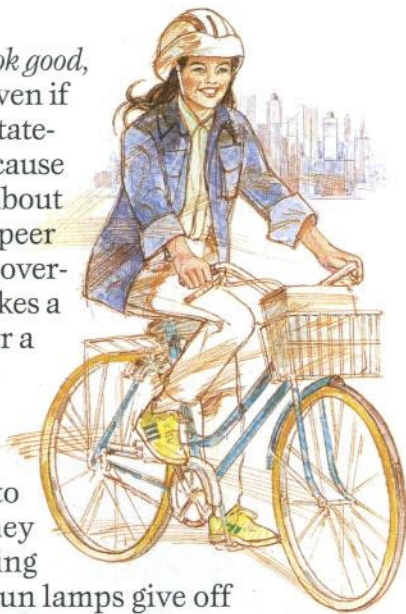
## Teens

*"If you want to look good, get a suntan."* Even if you think that statement is false because you've learned about sun protection, peer pressure can be overwhelming. It takes a lot of courage for a teen *not* to seek a suntan.

Some teens are so determined to get a tan that they patronize tanning salons, where sun lamps give off harmful ultraviolet rays. The intensity of the UVA radiation received in a tanning parlor may be two or more times as great as the amount you get while sunbathing at noon on the beach in the summer. The risk of skin damage is increased accordingly.

If you simply must have a tan, get it out of a bottle or tube. New self-tanning lotions and creams can duplicate a natural tan without injuring the skin. But be sure to apply—and reapply as directed—a regular sunscreen along with the self-tanner.

Being sun-safe doesn't condemn you to life indoors. If you love the beach, go early or late in the day, when the sun's rays are less intense. Take a supply of sunscreen that has an SPF of 15 or greater. Wear attractive sun-protective clothing and a wide-brimmed hat, and carry along a beach umbrella. And don't forget sunglasses with lenses that block most ultraviolet rays.



## Adults

The incidence of skin cancer in young adults is on the upswing. Melanoma is currently the most common cancer in women between the ages of 25 and 29, and about 30 percent of all melanomas occur in people who are under 45.

By the time they become adults, most people have accumulated enough hours, days, and years of sun exposure to damage their skin. Chronic, cumulative sun exposure is the main cause of both basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma. Occasional, intense exposures which result in sunburn are believed to be a key cause of melanoma. This is especially true for indoor workers who stay out in the sun only on weekends, vacations, and lunch hours.

Staying out in the sun without protection can add years to the appearance of your skin. The destructive process of photoaging produces profound structural changes in the skin, which often appear as fine wrinkles, deep grooves, blotchiness, sagging, and a leathery texture.

Some of these changes may appear as early as the age of 20 in anyone who has spent a great deal of time in the sun during childhood and the teen years. Compare the texture and color of your face and the back of your hands with the soft smoothness of body areas usually covered with clothing.



Fortunately, making sun protection an essential part of your fitness program may help reduce the amount of photoaging and may prevent skin cancer. This is particularly important for workers in outdoor occupations and for those who pursue sports, either as participants or spectators.

Even short exposures—going to the store, taking children to school, weeding the garden—add up over time to a damaging total, unless you take steps to protect yourself routinely all year around.

### **Older Adults**

Each year more than half of all new skin cancer cases occur in individuals over the age of 65. Blame a lifetime of sun exposure.

Since the risk of skin cancer rises with advancing age, regular skin self-examination becomes ever more important. Early detection is the best chance for a cure, so see a physician without delay if any mole or skin growth changes or a new one appears.

Any older person who requires medication may be at increased risk of developing photosensitivity, an intense skin reaction to the sun, which can be triggered by a number of prescription drugs. When your doctor prescribes a medication, be sure to ask if it can produce such a response.

Finally, look out for your eyes. The destructive effects of ultraviolet radiation are cumulative, so cataracts are most likely to develop later in life.

Skin cancers also may appear on and around the eyelids where the skin is only a millimeter thick. Sunglasses with large lenses that give broad-spectrum protection against both UVA and UVB rays should always be worn outdoors.

After you retire, your sun exposure may increase, especially if you spent most of your working years indoors. You may adopt a new lifestyle and devote many daytime hours to golf and other outdoor activities. Or, you may travel or relocate to sunnier places. If you follow protective strategies, you'll be able to extend the health of your skin over the years.

The same holds true whether you're two or 20, six or 60. The more carefully you practice sun safety, the healthier and more attractive your skin will stay.



# Sun Fitness Checklist for All Ages

- Avoid the sun from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Apply a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or greater half an hour before going outdoors and reapply as directed on the product container.
- Wear protective clothing, including a broad-brimmed hat and ultraviolet-blocking sunglasses.
- Stay out of tanning salons.
- Protect your children from the sun and teach them good sun safety habits.
- Practice skin self-examination at least every three months. If you spot any of the warning signs of skin cancer, see a doctor immediately.

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