

How to handle holiday horrors – Sunburn

Everyone loves a summer holiday, but it can also throw up some challenges for our skin. The obvious being sunburn. The BSF already offer some great sun safety tips here www.ittakesseven.org.uk/skin-cancer-facts but inevitably, on occasion people still get sunburnt.



Consultant Dermatologist and British Skin Foundation spokesperson, Dr Anjali Mahto explains *“Sunburn is an acute reaction in the skin that follows excessive overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation. It causes direct damage to DNA resulting in inflammation and death of skin cells. The risk is higher in equatorial areas or at altitude, particularly in those with fair skin types. Sunburn in childhood or adolescence can double the risk of developing melanoma in later life. Whilst the key is to avoid getting burnt, mistakes can and do occur.”*

Here, Dr Mahto gives some simple advice on how to reduce pain from sunburn and limit further damage.

Act quickly and get out of the sun

Cover up the affected areas and stay in the shade until your sunburn has healed. Wear loose cotton clothing that allows your skin to “breathe” over the sunburnt areas.

Take over the counter pain relief

Analgesia or painkillers can help relieve the pain and reduce inflammation caused by sunburn. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen are ideal and should be continued for a period of at least 48 hours if there are no contraindications. Paracetamol will help with pain but has little effect on inflammation.

Cool the skin

Apply a cool compress to the skin e.g. a towel dampened with cool water for 15 minutes, or take a cool bath or shower. Aim to keep the temperature just below luke-warm. Make sure the shower has a gentle flow of water rather than being on full power. If blisters are starting to develop, then a bath is preferable. Do not rub your skin with a towel, but gently pat it dry when you get out.

Moisturise

After a bath or shower, use an unperfumed cream or lotion to soothe the skin. Repeated

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applications of this are necessary to reduce the appearance of peeling and this may need to be continued for several weeks. Aloe vera or soy containing gels or lotions can be beneficial in soothing the skin. Aloe vera not only has a cooling effect on the skin but also acts as an anti-inflammatory. Be wary of using creams or lotions that contain petroleum, benzocaine, or lidocaine. These can either trap heat in the skin or cause local skin irritation.

Stay hydrated

Sunburn can encourage fluid loss through the skin. Drinking plenty of water will prevent dehydration and help your body recover. Alcohol should ideally be avoided during this time as it will make dehydration worse

Use of mild steroid cream

Using a weak steroid cream such as 0.5-1% hydrocortisone for 48 hours may decrease pain and swelling caused by sunburn and speed up the healing process. This is best avoided in small children.

Leave blisters alone

Try not to pop blisters as this can lead to infection and scarring. They will settle by themselves after a few days. In the meantime, treat the skin gently.

Remember sunburn can cause long-term damage to the skin and prevention should be the key. If further information is required about skin cancer and its prevention, make an appointment to see a dermatologist who can discuss sun-protection and mole monitoring with you in detail.



Find out more about our skin cancer appeal here: www.ittakesseven.org.uk

For further information please contact:

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