

## Sun protection and skin cancer - Q & A

Page content: Why is there such a price difference between different sunscreens if they all do the same thing?

This fact sheet lists a range of questions on sun protection and skin cancer which were posted by visitors to the Better Health Channel. Our experts provide the answers.

### **Q. What is the best relief for sunburn? My friends say moisturising day and night avoids peeling. Is this true?**

There are many myths about sunburn remedy but, in reality, there are no effective cures to reverse the redness and pain. Sunburn is the body's defence mechanism against exposure to both UVA and UVB rays. Our skin produces melanin to defend against the damage caused by UV radiation. We can see this occurring as our skin reddens or tans. Tans are a sign of skin damage.

Moisturising will return moisture levels to your skin but will not prevent peeling. If sunburn is severe enough, your skin will peel regardless, as the skin cells have died and your body naturally replaces them. Available sunburn remedies may alleviate your discomfort but cannot reverse the physical effects of sun damage. You should never rely on home remedies or products like after-sun care creams to keep your skin healthy, supple and smooth. Protection from the sun is the best method to prevent premature ageing, discolouration and wrinkles.

### **Q. I read in the paper recently that there is no difference between cheap sunscreens and expensive ones. Why then is there such a price difference if they all do the same thing?**

Fundamentally, there is little difference between the protective contents of sunscreen. Sunscreen in Australia must meet strict guidelines, so all products contain the primary ingredients that combine to protect your skin according to the rating on the bottle. Prices vary, usually as a result of the quality and effectiveness of the additives in the sunscreen or simply because of the brand name.

### **Q. Sunscreen irritates my skin. Do you know of any brands that are for sensitive skins?**

Some people suffer reactions to the ingredients in sunscreen. If you do, experiment with different brands, particularly those designed for children or sensitive skin. Fragrance-free sunscreen is also a better option, as it is often this component that stimulates the allergic reaction.

### **Q. I get lots of freckles. Does that mean I am likely to get skin cancer?**

Freckles are signs of sun exposure – the more UV radiation you receive, the more freckles you will get. If you have a lot of freckles, it usually means that you have sun-sensitive skin and that you have spent a lot of time in the sun. This would put you in a higher risk category for skin cancer compared to those with darker skin. The freckles on their own do not contribute to skin cancer.

### **Q. I've had psoriasis for 30 years. Sometimes the sun's rays are beneficial and at other times they are not. Do I need to apply sunscreen?**

Yes. While UV light is used as a treatment for the effects of psoriasis, it should be carefully regulated and controlled. If you seek natural sunlight to reduce your symptoms, you should ensure your skin is protected from undue damage by wearing sunscreen. While you may experience a marked reduction in your symptoms by spending time in the sun, you risk skin damage if you are unprotected. Seek medical advice before you deliberately expose yourself to sunlight.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- The Cancer Council Helpline Tel. 131 120
- Multilingual Cancer Information Line, Victoria – see website for contact details [www.cancervic.org.au/other\\_languages](http://www.cancervic.org.au/other_languages)
- SunSmart

### **Want to know more?**

Go to More information for support groups, related links and references.

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Cancer Council Victoria

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