

Sun protection in the snow

Most Australians are aware of the dangers of ultraviolet (UV) radiation during summer. Yet we often forget that winter activities such as snow skiing or snowboarding also pose a high risk of sunburn and tanning. UV radiation is more intense in alpine regions than at sea level because the atmosphere is thinner due to altitude, letting more UV rays to reach the earth's surface.

Snow is also very efficient at reflecting UV radiation, which puts exposed areas such as the face at increased risk of sunburn and skin damage. Don't be fooled by cold and cloudy days – you can still get sunburnt in the snow. Always cover up with clothing, eye protection and sunscreen.

Protective clothing and hats

Suggestions include:

- A balaclava or beanie that covers your ears will keep your head warm and reduce the risk of sun exposure.
- Scarves and jackets with high collars do a great job at keeping you warm and dry but also protect your skin from the sun's harmful UV rays.

Apply sunscreen

Suggestions include:

- All exposed areas of skin should be covered in water resistant, broad spectrum SPF 30+ sunscreen (broad spectrum means it protects against UVA and UVB rays).
- Apply sunscreen about 20 minutes before venturing outside to allow absorption time.
- Put some sunscreen in your jacket pocket and reapply every two hours.
- Never use sunscreen as the only form of sun protection, as it does not offer complete protection.
- Apply SPF 30+ lip balm or zinc cream to protect your lips.

Seek shade

Wherever practical, consider taking indoors rest breaks, especially through the middle of the day when UV levels are at their peak.

Protect your eyes

'Snow blindness' (photokeratitis) is sun damage to the cornea of the eye. It is a real risk at the snow. The condition is usually temporary and may last only a few days, but it can be very painful. UV exposure may contribute to other eye conditions including cataracts, pterygium and age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

Suggestions to protect your eyes include:

- Always wear wraparound sunglasses or goggles. Aim for a snug fit, so that UV can't get through the top or sides of your eyewear.
- Choose eyewear that meets Australian Standard AS1067. This means the glasses will block 95 per cent of UV radiation.
- Sunglasses and goggles can be fitted with prescription lenses. See your optometrist for more information.

Protect your children from the sun

Children need as much sun protection at the snow as you do. Suggestions include:

- Instil good habits early. If you protect your child from a young age, they will learn to be sunsmart through example.
- Apply sunscreen 20 minutes before heading outside and reapply every two hours. Many companies produce sensitive skin formulas suitable for children.
- Children's headwear should provide protection for their ears, as well as their heads.
- Toddlers are great imitators and are more likely to wear their sunglasses or goggles if you lead by example and wear yours.
- Eyewear for children should have plastic instead of glass lenses for safety reasons and should meet Australian Standard AS1067.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local pharmacist
- Optometrist
- SunSmart
- Cancer Council Helpline Tel. 13 11 20
- Multilingual Cancer Information Line, Victoria Tel. (03) 9209 0169

Things to remember

- UV radiation is more intense in alpine regions than at sea level.
- Cover up with clothing and a hat. Apply broad spectrum SPF 30+ sunscreen to all exposed areas of skin.
- Wear sunglasses or goggles that meet Australian Standard AS1067 to protect your eyes from the damaging effects of UV radiation.
- Check the UV level each day before hitting the slopes in the daily newspaper or online at the Bureau of Metrology or SunSmart websites.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

SunSmart

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