

WEST AFRICAN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

SKIN CANCER AWARENESS – SUN PROTECTION

The skin is a remarkable organ that has numerous functions including protection from hazardous agents found in the environment. Since it is the most obvious or visible organ of the body which is constantly exposed to the outside world, just like the other aspect of our bodies, it must be taken care of properly, in order to keep it healthy.

Sunshine is beneficial in helping the body to synthesize vitamin D, a crucial vitamin needed for our growth and maintenance. Unfortunately, excessive exposure can lead to skin cancers such as melanomas. Another undesirable effect of too much sun is aging.

Several countries have campaigned against skin cancer over the years but the most successful campaign was in the 1980s in Australia. The Slip! Slop! Slap! Campaign was such a success that the simple message of sun protection is still being propagated today.

SLIP on a shirt/protective clothing

SLOP on sunblock

SLAP on a hat

With time, two other requirements were included in campaigns: **SEEK** and **SLIDE**.

SEEK shade and **SLIDE** on sunglasses.



Slip on sun protective clothing



Slop on SPF30+ sunscreen. Reapply every two hours



Slap on a broad-brimmed hat



Seek shade



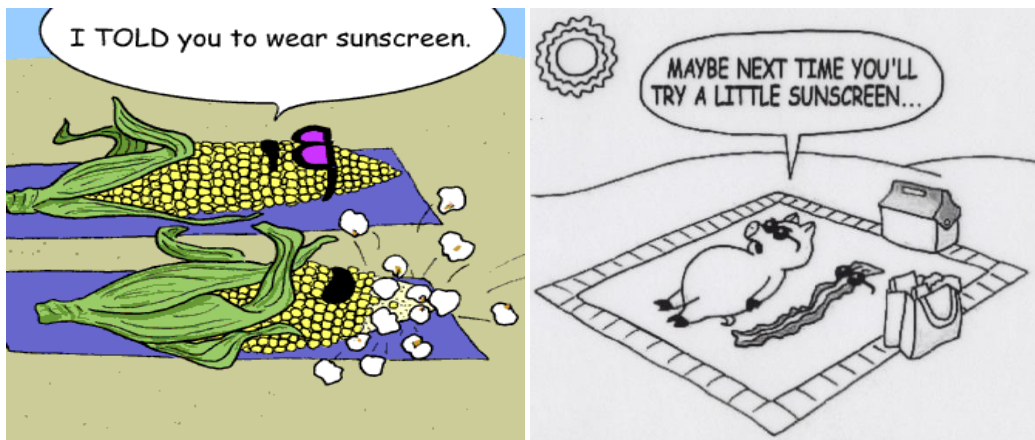
Slide on wrap-around sunglasses

In general, the guidelines for sun protection are enumerated below:

FURTHER TIPS ON SUN PROTECTION

1) Sun block:

Diligent application of sun block is important. The best agents to use must be broad spectrum, offering protection against both UVA and UVB. They must also have Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of +30. They must be applied before going out in the sun and must be reapplied frequently and liberally, as often as every two hours, especially when swimming or exercising outdoors. It is interesting to know that sun blocks are still recommended even when the sun is not perceived, especially on cloudy days.



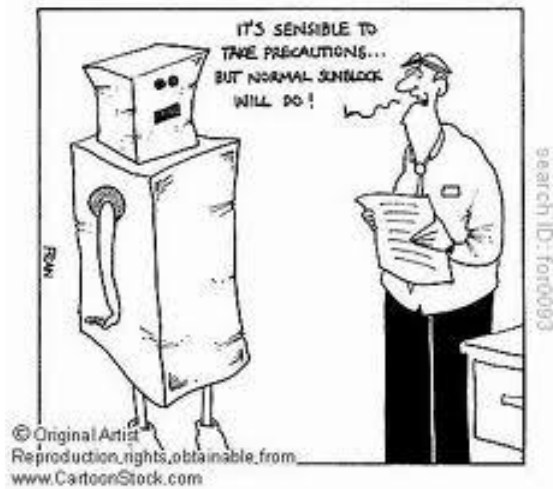
2) Shade:

The sun rays are most intense between 10 am and 3pm. During this period, it is advisable to seek shade as much as it is practicable. One can gauge the times to avoid direct sunlight when our shadows are perceived to be shorter than we actually are.



3) Protective clothing:

When going out, it is advisable to wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved apparel, long trousers/skirts, sun glasses, wide-brimmed hat, etc.



WHAT TYPE OF SUN BLOCK TO USE?

This is a question that many ask. The answer is simple: “One that you are comfortable using”.

So long as the general principles are adhered to, namely: Broad spectrum, water resistant, SPF 30 and more, any formulation that is selected by an individual is fine. There are lotions, gels, sprays, ointments etc. available on the market so there is a large selection that one can choose from. There are even lip balms with SPF so full coverage is encouraged!

When applying sun blocks, all areas of the body that may be exposed to sunrays should have generous doses applied, although care must be taken when applying around the eyes.



TANNING

A good tan is the envy of many but one must be careful when acquiring a tan. There are several skin types and not everyone tans very well. Others may be more susceptible to sunburns and may be at a higher risk for skin cancers. Tanning beds must be avoided as much as possible as many medical reports indicate an increasing number of skin cancer cases among users.

SUNBURNS

Just in case the above advice is not adhered to and sunburns occur, first aid methods that can be administered before professional medical care is sought include:

- Cooling – splash cool water on site or take a cool bath to reduce the heat.
- Moisturize – as soon as skin is splashed with water or after bathing, apply a moisturizer to lock in water into the skin and prevent dehydration.
- Water - drink lots of water to prevent dehydration.
- Analgesics such as Paracetamol or Brufen may be taken to reduce the inflammation, redness, swelling and pain experienced.
- Medical care must be sought as soon as possible to avoid complications.

SUSPICIOUS LOOKING LESIONS

Periodically examine your skin, especially if you have moles. Take note of changes and report to a doctor when you do. Let someone examine your back and other parts that are not easily accessible. The following are features that one must look out for- these have been made easy to remember by the acronym **ABCDE**:

- **A**– Asymmetry (is the mole regular in shape; that is, is one half identical to the other half?)
- **B**– Borders (are the borders of the mole regular or jagged or ill-defined?)
- **C**– Colour (are there various colours – red, blue, brown, black - observed in the mole or is it uniform in colour?)
- **D**– Diameter (is the diameter of the mole >6mm?)
- **E**– Evolution (is the mole changing rapidly or is it different from other moles on your skin? Is it sticking out like an ‘ugly duckling’?)

Melanoma, a type of skin cancer can also affect the nails so they should also be examined for changes such as brown or black streak underneath the nail.

Not all skin cancers will show symptoms such pain, itching or bleeding therefore, any skin change that one is uncertain of or raises suspicion should be reported to a doctor, preferably a dermatologist, as soon as possible.

Enjoy the sun but take protection against skin cancers!