



Sun Dazed

DR SUNDUS HUSSAIN-MORGAN TELLS US HOW TO PROTECT OUR SKIN IN SINGAPORE'S BLAZING SUN



Though short exposure to sunlight is beneficial for vitamin D production, prolonged exposure can cause short-term problems such as sunburns and "prickly heat", and significant long-term conditions such as skin cancers (malignant and non-malignant melanomas). Sun exposure also plays a significant role in the skin's ageing, resulting in fine wrinkles, mottling, skin roughness and pigmentation.

The sun's damaging effects are the result of UV (ultraviolet) radiation A and B. UVA penetrates deep and causes skin ageing as well as some forms of skin cancer. UVB is the main cause of all types of skin cancer, as well as sunburns.

Lying 137 kilometres north of the equator, Singapore has a greater exposure of UV radiation all year round. Although cloud cover may absorb most of the UV radiation, harmful effects from the sun can still occur on a cloudy day.

This means that during both a sunny and a cloudy day in Singapore, protection from the sun is essential if you are planning to spend time outdoors during the daytime.

Individuals with skin type I or II are those who always burn rather than tan, usually those with pale white skin, red or blond hair, and blue or green eyes. These individuals are at highest risk for photoageing and skin cancer, and are in greater need of sun protection.

Epidemiological studies have shown that heavy sun exposure in childhood is a risk factor for melanoma later in life, so extra protection of your little ones is highly recommended.

There are a number of ways you can protect yourself and your loved ones from the sun:

Avoid the midday sun

Reducing sun exposure between the peak hours of 11am and 3pm, even on a cloudy day, will significantly reduce the sun's harmful effects. This is particularly important for babies and young children.

Use photoprotective sunscreens

Most dermatologists recommend the use of a sunscreen with a minimum SPF (sun-protection factor) of 30 or higher (SPF 50 for babies, young children and people with pale skin).

To improve the effectiveness of your sunscreen, you should apply it 20 minutes before you go outdoors. Use enough sunscreen to cover the entire body and pay special attention to the face, ears and nose.

Remember that lips can burn too, so cover lips with a lip-balm sunscreen or SPF 30 or higher. It's important to remember to reapply approximately every two hours, or after swimming or heavy sweating.

Use photoprotective clothing

Clothing should provide maximum body coverage with the use of long trousers, long-sleeved shirt, a wide-brimmed hat and UV protective sunglasses. Tightly woven synthetic fabrics made from nylon and polyester will provide the maximum protection.

Tightly woven cotton blends are nearly as UV protective and are more comfortable in the high heat and humidity. A t-shirt will only provide an SPF of about 15, but this falls when the shirt is wet. It is therefore important to apply sunscreen to covered parts of the body, as well as those that are exposed.

Clothes made from fabric that specifically provide UV protection are available. Make sure that they provide an SPF of 30 or higher. These are most useful for young children and individuals who participate in outdoor activities such as hiking, exercise and gardening.

Check your skin

Make a habit of checking your skin and your family's. When looking for signs of malignant melanoma, use the ABCDE rule to guide you:

- Asymmetry, one half is not equal to the other;
- Border that is irregular or poorly defined;
- Colour variation between tan, brown, black and sometimes white, red, or blue;
- Diameter, usually greater than 6mm;
- Evolving mole that is changing in size, shape or colour.

When looking for signs of non-melanoma skin cancers, you should be aware of a spot or sore that does not heal within four weeks and continues to itch, hurt, scab, or bleed, and areas where the skin has broken down or ulcerates with no obvious cause and does not heal within four weeks.

One benefit for a lot of us who live in Singapore is the year-round sunshine. However, if you spend more than twenty minutes outdoors whilst running quick errands or picking up the children, it is still important to protect yourself and your loved ones from the sun.

If you have any concerns about your skin, you should consult your doctor for a full skin check.

Be sun smart and enjoy the outdoors safely!

Dr Sundus Hussain-Morgan graduated from Kings College School of Medicine and Dentistry in London, UK, and practiced in London for eight years prior to relocating to Singapore in 2008.

Join Dr Hussain-Morgan for a talk on sun protection

The Sun's Damaging Effects: Can Nutrition and Supplements Help?

Date: 7 March, 7:30 pm

30 March, 10:00 am

Venue: Body With Soul

44/45 Rochester Park

www.bodywithsoul.com