

# Michelle Tarbox, MD

## Why is it so important to protect your skin from the sun?

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So summertime is a wonderful time of the year a lot of people like to go outside and enjoy the great outdoors. And I think that that's a wonderful thing. We do want to do it intelligently and make sure we're protecting ourselves so that we don't suffer for it later. Sun protection is a key part of enjoying the sunny weather, we want to think about a multidisciplinary approach to protecting our skin. I like to use a hat, sun protective clothing, and of course, sunscreen that works well with my skin. You want to think about if you have sensitivities, avoiding things that might irritate your skin. So if you're fragrance sensitive, going for a fragrance free sunscreen is a good idea. If you're sensitive to chemical sunscreens going with a physical sunscreen, like a titanium or zinc dioxide based sunscreen can be beneficial as well. Some people are concerned about chemical absorption and sunscreens. So the best products to use are ones that are made for the tiniest people. So if you're very concerned about that some of the gentlest sunscreens on the market are actually made for children and babies. And those usually also don't have a lot of fragrance in them. Some people are concerned about benzene and sunscreens. And there have been some sunscreens found to have those, the vast majority of those are sprays and gels. So if you wish to avoid that, just stay away from that type of sunscreen.

## What would you say to people who don't use sunscreen because they claim they can't get sunburn?

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One of the interesting things that you learn in medical school is how amazingly adaptive slash a little bit lazy our bodies are. So if our bodies don't have to do something, they generally don't do it. Our bodies make a tan in response to DNA damage from UV radiation. So any tan is actually a sign of DNA damage to your skin cells. Over time that DNA damage can accelerate the aging process. And it can also increase your risk of skin cancer. So a tan is actually a marker that you're getting a little bit of sun damage, and you want to protect and decrease the amount of that that occurs over the course of your lifetime. Burning is uncomfortable, and it can cause irritation and inflammation and peeling. But the more we understand about UV radiation, the more we realize that a lot of the significant damage that happens to our skin comes from the other flavor if you will have UV radiation, so we have the UVB or burning rays that go pretty superficially into the skin. And then we have the UVA which we now refer to as the aging rays that go deeper into the skin and can cause damage to deeper levels of tissue that are more important and can potentially even increase the risk of skin cancer more.

## What is the best protection?

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The best protection is a full team approach. You want to think about the time of day you're going out, you want to think about where there will be shade that you can engage in, you want to think about your sun protective clothing, your hats, your sunglasses, your long sleeves, in a breathable fabric. And then you want to think about also nutritional things people tolerate sun exposure better if they have a diet rich in plant based nutrients. And the beautiful colors of the summer vegetables and fruits are telling us that they have great pigments, they can absorb and detoxify some of the damage that occurs throughout the course of our exposure to different what we call free radicals. So there's beautiful colorful fruits and vegetables enrich our diet, but they also help our body deal with damage.

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Do all outdoor areas require the same amount of protection?

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Different terrains and elevations can cause changes in how severe the sun exposure is higher elevations tend to cause more sun exposure. And then being on any reflective surface or around water can also increase the amount of UV radiation as well as just visible light that you're experiencing on your skin. So those unique exposures require a little bit of a different strategy. If you're hiking in the mountains, you have to focus on the parts of your body that are exposed and you have to think about your face probably the tops of your hands. If you're at the beach, more people have more sun exposed more skin exposed to the sun. And also you have reflective structures around you with the sand as well as the water. And so you have to think about the sand and the water reflecting the UV radiation back up a little bit onto your body which can happen. So you have to be more aggressive with your sun protection in those settings. And think about the fact that also the water can help take some of the sunscreen off and needs to be reapplied more frequently.