

TOO MUCH SUN? NATURAL SUNBURN REMEDIES

Normal, limited exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun produces beneficial Vitamin D in the skin. However, overexposure to the sun can result in a burn that causes inflammation. Anyone who visits a beach, goes fishing, works in the yard, or simply is out in the sun can get sunburn. Improper tanning bed use can also cause sunburn. Although seldom fatal, sunburn can be disabling and cause great discomfort.

Causes

Skin injury can start within 30 minutes of overexposure. Both UVA and UVB rays, which refer to different wavelengths in the light spectrum, are responsible for sunburn, premature aging of the skin, and wrinkles. Since it is more damaging to the skin, UVB presents a higher skin cancer risk.

Those at greatest risk for sunburn include those who: (1) use tanning beds (which produce both UVA and UVB rays); (2) travel to the southern United States, regions close to the equator, and places at high altitudes; (3) are light-skinned and fair-haired; and (4) have suffered prior skin injury.

Symptoms

Mild cases of sunburn usually result in minor skin redness and irritation. Untreated and with enough exposure, sunburn can cause shock (from poor circulation to vital organs) and even death (from sun poisoning).

The skin turns red about 2-6 hours after exposure and feels itchy or irritated. The peak effects are noted at 12-24 hours. More severe cases (i.e., sun poisoning) are complicated by severe skin burning and blistering (ranging from a very fine blister to very large water-filled blisters with red, tender, raw skin underneath), skin loss (about 4-7 days after exposure), dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, and infection.

Natural Remedies

These natural remedies may relieve a mild-to-moderate sunburn:

1) Aloe Vera Gel: The long green leaves of the African aloe plant contain a gel that has healing, anti-inflammatory effects. Topical aloe gel is available in a tube, or you can even use a real aloe plant . . . cut off a spear, split it open, and rub the clear gel from the inside of the leaf on the sunburn. Pure aloe gel may be too harsh to treat severe burns or wounds.

2) Tannins: Naturally occurring complex compounds in many plants, and found in various foods, (including tea, wine, fruits, legumes, and chocolate), tannins help take the sting out of sunburn. Try steeping a few black tea bags in hot water, cooling them in the fridge, and placing them on the burned areas. You might also try melting dark black tea ice cubes on the burned area. Aaaaah, so soothing!

3) Topical Apple Cider Vinegar: To prevent peeling and itching of a localized sunburn, apply full strength Bragg's Apple Cider Vinegar (organic, unfiltered, raw) (BACV) on the affected skin with a

vinegar-soaked cheese cloth, washcloth, or spray bottle. If the sunburn covers a large part of the body, try adding 1 cup of BACV to a cool bath. After soaking in the bath, gingerly dry the burned areas and spray them with BACV. After 5 minutes, pat on aloe vera gel.

4) Hydrotherapy: Brief baths, showers, and compresses of cool-to-lukewarm water can help to keep the sunburn cool and hydrated. Try wetting the burned areas for 10-15 minutes several times per day. It is also important to drink plenty of water. Since we lose more water when we're out in the heat and the sun, dehydration can cause headaches and fatigue. The general recommendation under normal circumstances is half one's weight in ounces of water, so intake should exceed this amount in case of sunburn.

When to Seek Medical Care

If the sunburn is severe enough, call your doctor. Conditions that should motivate you to go to a hospital's emergency department include: severe pain; severe blistering; headache; confusion; fainting; nausea or vomiting; and/or an acute problem with another medical condition.

www.About.com, Natural Remedies for Sunburn ~ Sunburn Relief, Cathy Wong, About.com Guide, *July 24, 2007*;
www.emedicinehealth.com/sunburn, George Woodward, DO, FAAEM, and Jeffrey S Smowton, MD, FACEP, FACP.