

Slacked on the sunscreen? Minimize the damage



5 Ways

By Kim Painter

Getting a sunburn is a very bad idea. It hurts, peels and inflicts long-lasting, wrinkle-inducing damage. It's especially bad for children: Even one blistering burn may double the lifetime risk of melanoma, a serious skin cancer. Burns are preventable with sunscreen, shade and clothing. But mistakes happen. So here are five ways to ease the pain and maybe limit damage.

Kim Painter's 5 Ways column appears every other Thursday.



DO: Take an anti-inflammatory to reduce swelling of the burned area.

DONT: Hit the beach without plenty of sun protection.



1 Act quickly.

If you feel the tell-tale tingling of a burn or see any sign of skin reddening on yourself or your child, get out of the sun and start treatment. "Sunburn tends to sneak up on us. It can take four to six hours for the symptoms to develop," says Barton Schmitt, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital Colorado and author of a new book, *My Child Is Sick! Expert Advice for Managing Common Illnesses and Injuries*, published by the American Academy of Pediatrics. So a touch of pink at the beach could turn into a big problem later.

2 Moisturize.

After a cool shower or bath, slather on a moisturizing cream or lotion to soothe the skin. Repeat frequently to make peeling and flaking less noticeable. And consider a product containing vitamin C and vitamin E: It might help limit skin damage (though studies have not proved that), says Shawn Allen, a dermatologist in Boulder, Colo., and spokesman for the Skin Cancer Foundation. It's also OK to use a hydrocortisone cream for a day or two to relieve discomfort, Allen says. Not OK: scrubbing, picking or peeling your skin or breaking blisters.

3 Hydrate.

Any burn draws fluid to the skin surface and away from the rest of the body. So drink extra water, juice and sports drinks for a couple of days and watch for signs of dehydration: dry mouth, thirst, reduced urination, headache, dizziness and sleepiness. Children are especially vulnerable, so check with a doctor if they appear ill.

4 Don't wait to medicate.

Take (or give your child) a dose of ibuprofen (for example, Advil) as soon as you see signs of sunburn and keep it up for the next 48 hours, Schmitt advises. "It cuts back on the swelling and redness that is going to occur" and might prevent some long-term skin damage. "It's not just treating the symptoms; it's treating the severity of the symptoms." Acetaminophen (for example, Tylenol) will treat the pain but does not have the same anti-inflammatory effect.

5 Assess the damage.

Most sunburns, even those that cause a few blisters, can be treated at home. But if a blistering burn covers 20% or more of the body (a child's whole back), seek medical attention, Allen says. Anyone with a sunburn who is suffering fevers and chills should also seek medical help, he says. Finally: Consider the burn a warning that your sun-safety net has failed and vow to do better. That means using sunscreen, covering up with clothing and hats, and avoiding the sun as much as possible between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.