

10 new sun safety myths debunked

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Credit: Cancer Research UK

We all love talking about the weather. And it's easy for myths about sun protection to spread. Last year we tackled 12 common sun safety myths, but there are still plenty more alternative facts out there.

So for Sun Awareness Week we've picked out 10 new myths that we hear a lot.

But one fact to remember is to not let [sunburn](#) catch you out, because too much UV from the sun (or sunbeds) causes most cases of [skin](#) cancer. This might feel like old news, but rates of melanoma (the most serious type of skin cancer) are still increasing.

By dodging these myths, we can all do our best to protect ourselves when the sun is strong.

Myth 1: 'The sun is strongest when it's hottest'

The heat of the sun doesn't come from its skin-damaging UV rays. The UV rays are always strongest when the sun is highest in the sky, which in the UK summer is between 11am and 3pm (it can be different abroad). But the temperature varies more and tends to be highest slightly later. So if you want to get out and enjoy the nice weather later in the day when it's still warm, the risk of burning won't be as high.

Myth 2: 'You can only burn in the middle of summer'

The sun can be strong enough to burn in the UK from the start of April to the end of September, even if it doesn't feel that warm, or it's a cloudy day. The UV Index can tell you how strong the sun is where you are today, you can find it on weather forecasts and the met office website. If the UV index is 3 or above think about protecting your skin. And take extra care if you get sunburnt easily or have a lighter skin tone.

Myth 3: 'Sun damage always looks red and peely'

Not necessarily. If your skin's gone red or pink in the sun, that's sunburn, and it's dangerous due to the damage the UV rays cause to DNA inside cells. If your skin goes pink but then a tan develops that still counts as having burnt.

But you can't always see the damage. For people with naturally darker skin it might just feel irritated, tender or itchy rather than your skin changing colour.

Myth 4: 'The odd sunburn doesn't make much difference'

Getting sunburnt doesn't mean you will definitely develop skin cancer. But sunburn just once every 2 years can triple the risk of melanoma. So if you have had sunburn in the past, it's a good idea to think about what more you can do to protect your skin next time.

Myth 5: 'Higher SPF sunscreens are lots better than lower SPF ones'

No sunscreen is 100% effective and as SPF increases, sunscreens provide less and less extra protection. SPF15 should be high enough wherever you are in the world, if it's used properly. Higher SPFs don't add much in terms of protection and might encourage you to spend longer in the sun inadvertently leading to more damage. Sunscreens with SPF lower than 15 aren't recommended, and also make sure sunscreen has 4 stars or more, for UVA protection.

Myth 6: 'A 'base tan' will protect me on holiday'

Some people think a pre-holiday tan or sunbed tans will protect them from burning, but a tan offers very little protection against the sun. Some studies have found that tans only offer protection equivalent to using factor 3 sunscreen. And tans from sunbeds could be as low as SPF 1.

Myth 7: 'Putting sunscreen on once is enough'

It's not. Even if it says once-a-day on the label, all sunscreens should be re-applied regularly. Some products rub, wash or sweat off more easily than others. But it's also really easy to miss bits of your body so don't be shy with it, put plenty on. The best way to use sunscreen is to think of it as the last line of defence for the parts of your body you can't cover up with clothes.

Myth 8: 'Sunbeds are a safer way to tan'

This [myth](#) is a persistent one. But the evidence is clear, sunbeds cause [skin cancer](#) and there's no such thing as a safe tan. A tan is a sign that your body is trying to repair the damage caused by UV rays. That's why we want to see more people embracing their natural skin colour through our Own Your Tone campaign.

Myth 9: 'Sunscreen lasts forever'

We've probably all turned to that old bottle of sunscreen at the back of the cupboard that's been there for an unknown number of years. But most sunscreens expire. Look out for a small open jar icon on the bottle with the number of months the product can be used after opening. And like most cosmetics, sunscreens should be stored in a cool place and not in direct sunlight.

Fear not though. You don't need to worry about the cost of replacing expensive sunscreens. When it comes to protection, price doesn't matter it's the SPF and star rating that does.

Myth 10: 'You can't get sun damage through glass'

Indoors you're mostly protected from sunburn, but some UV rays can get through glass. So if you spend lots of time driving or sitting in a

conservatory when the sun is strong, then long-term you might be at risk of damage from UVA rays. If you're stuck by the window, protect your skin with clothes and [sunscreen](#) with 4 or more stars.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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