

How common drugs, lotions can worsen sunlight's harm to your skin

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Most folks know that a good sunscreen can guard against the sun's harmful rays, but many might not realize that some medications and creams can undo some of that protection.

"There are multiple reasons we should be mindful of excessive sun exposure aside from [skin cancer](#), although that's certainly important," said Dr. Kaveh Nezafati, an assistant professor of dermatology at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas. "There may also be some external factors that can make us more sensitive to sunlight."

Nezafati explained that certain medications can render your skin more vulnerable to the sun's harmful rays and offered some advice on how to protect yourself.

Certain drugs contain ingredients that can trigger a physical reaction when the skin is exposed to UV light, according to the [U.S. Food & Drug Administration](#). The severity of the reaction depends on the drug dosage and the amount of time spent outdoors or in the tanning booth.

Blood pressure medications such as hydrochlorothiazide are a common example.

"Basically, what happens is the [ultraviolet radiation](#) reacts with the medicine circulating in the patient's blood, converting that drug into a chemical byproduct that can directly damage [skin cells](#) and cause sunburns," Nezafati said in a UT Southwestern news release.

Some antibiotics like ciprofloxacin and doxycycline, which treat a wide assortment of infections, work the same way, he added.

"The most important thing is for patients to be aware of the side effects of the medications they are taking and to be vigilant if they need to take extra precautions as a result."

But medications aren't the only thing that can raise the risk of [sunburn and skin damage](#): Beauty products can contain ingredients that increase photosensitivity.

Thanks to social media, the popularity of skin care routines has skyrocketed in recent years and there's no shortage of oils, ointments and lotions. But Nezafati said that over-the-counter products such as retinol serums and skin exfoliants can make the skin more vulnerable to sun damage.

What to do? Scan product labels for ingredients such as alpha and beta hydroxy acids, used for their anti-aging properties, he said.

"These exfoliants help remove the top layer of dead skin cells to smooth and brighten the complexion, but that makes it easier for UV radiation to penetrate the skin," Nezafati explained.

That's why using sunscreen is so important, he added.

While many makeup brands now include sunscreen, that likely isn't enough. Instead, apply a layer of sunscreen with at least 30 sun protection factor (SPF) under your makeup.

Still, medications and beauty creams aren't the only things that pose a danger to your skin: Citrus juice can cause a skin reaction after sun exposure.

"Certain plants contain [chemical compounds](#) known as furocoumarins," Nezafati explained. "When it gets on our skin and is exposed to sunlight, UV rays activate this chemical, which then destroys cells. In Texas, considering our diet and native wildlife, the most common culprit of this is the juice from limes."

Dubbed the "margarita burn" because the popular cocktail often comes with a lime wedge, this reaction can cause itchy rashes, swelling and fluid-filled blisters, which tend to emerge one to two days after exposure and last for days. The best preventive measure is to wash your hands

after handling these ingredients.

"After it breaks out, there's little to do but let it run its course," said Nezafati, who recommends an over-the-counter cortisone cream to help with itchiness and irritation.

"Most cases are mild and only require gentle wound care," he noted. "You just have to wait for the skin to exfoliate and heal on its own."

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