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14 Surprising Things That Make Sunburn Worse



We all have a bit too much fun in the sun from time to time, which we usually pay for with scorching skin so red it could rival that of a lobster's. But while it's no secret that sunburns are no fun—and, yes, not wearing sunscreen exposes you to the risk of skin cancer—what you may or may not know is that you can actually make yourself more prone to burning by making a few surprising mistakes. (See: The color of your shirt.) What's more, once you're burned, you can make your sunburn even worse with the choices you make afterwards, such as spritzing on certain fragrances or sipping certain citrusy drinks. Whether you're trying to avoid a bad burn or already have one, make sure to avoid these harmful habits that make a sunburn worse.

1 Using smart phones or tablets

Many folks bring their phone or even a tablet to the beach so they can read a good book. However, you might actually want to leave your electronics behind. A 2015 study published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* showed that an iPad's reflection could increase ultraviolet light exposure by up to 85 percent in just one hour, while a simple iPhone could up it by 36 percent.

2Using certain medications

While you might want to take anti-inflammatory medication to soothe your skin pain following a sunburn, they can actually be the reason you were burned in the first place, according to a 2000 study from Purdue University. Antihistamines, non-steroidal anti-inflammatories, and antibiotics can all increase a person's sensitivity to light and make them more susceptible to the sun's UV rays—even if they already have a sunburn.

"With some medications, sunlight exposure can trigger a fine red rash, with others, patients burn more severely or more quickly than normal," Gail Newton, the study's author, explained. "Ideally, people should avoid prolonged exposure to sunlight while using one of these medications. When exposure cannot be avoided, people should use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15, preferably 30."

3Taking hot showers

When the sun hits your skin for a prolonged period, it can often dry it out. And, even if you find that hot water feels good on your dried-out skin, you may just be doing more damage by showering in scorching water, as it can actually strip your skin of essential oils.

"This may lead to blistering and possibly prolong the healing process," Solomon says. "While cold showers typically feel uncomfortable, sticking to lukewarm or cool showers when you're burned will feel help make your burn feel better. The temperature should be no warmer than what you would expect from a heated pool, which is around 84 degrees."

4Citrus exposure

Sure, poolside margaritas always sound like a good idea—but as it turns out, they may not be such a good idea for your skin. According to a 2007 Baylor College of Medicine study, the slice of lime in most of these summer drinks may leave your skin prone to burning. How? Citrus can cause phytophotodermatitis, which produces a sunburn-like reaction on the skin that can swell, blister, and leave behind skin discoloration.

5More sun

No matter how much sunscreen you're reapplying, Los Angeles board-certified dermatologist Tsippora Shainhouse says the worst thing you can do for your skin after a sunburn is actually go back in the sun.

"Do not go back out in the sun with your skin exposed," Shainhouse says. "If you must be outdoors, apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30+ and wear sun-shielding clothing with longer sleeves, higher necklines, and be sure to cover up the sunburned areas. Stay in the shade, under an awning, umbrella and a wide-brimmed hat."

6Wearing certain fragrances

Save the scents if you're headed out in the sun. According to **Sheel Desai Solomon**, a board-certified dermatologist from North Carolina, many fragrances and colognes include ingredients that make you more prone to burning.

"Oil of bergamot is especially notorious for this and can cause a severe, blistering reaction when it's on your skin and exposed to the sun," Solomon explained. "Other perfume ingredients and essential oils, like rosemary and lavender oils, can make your skin more sensitive to the rays, too."

7 Wearing certain colors

When in the sun, the colors you wear matter—and we don't mean in terms of capturing an Instagram-worthy selfie. The color of your clothes can actually make your ability to get burned worse (or conversely, help prevent a burn!).

As shown in a 2009 study published by the American Chemical Society, cotton dyed deep blue or red provided greater UV protection than when dyed shades of yellow, as darker colors tend to have better UV absorption. So, stick to the red blouses on your next vacay and you won't see the shade on your skin.

8 Using SPF moisturizers

You may think any 'ole SPF will get the job done, but it turns out that the product you use does make a difference. While many moisturizers contain SPF counts that rival a lot of sunscreens on the market, according to a study published in the PLOS One journal, application between the two products is not comparable.

In a study of 84 participants, nearly 16.6 percent missed major areas of the face when applying SPF moisturizer, compared to only 11.1 percent who used sunscreen.

9 Putting makeup over it

Sunburns are not exactly pleasing to the eyes, especially when they blister and peel. But, if you're thinking of using makeup to cover up, think again. Makeup can clog the skin, leading to more hurt than heal.

"The only way the burn will heal is if you let your skin breathe. Introducing various make-ups through dirty sponges or brushes will only increase your risk for infection or allergic reaction, which will ultimately make it all worse," Solomon says.

10 Not reapplying sunscreen

If you're not reapplying sunscreen, then the product can actually be counteractive. In a 2006 University of California Riverside study, researchers found that applying sunscreen once, and not again, can make a person more prone to more damage than if they never applied it in the first place.

“Sunscreens do an excellent job protecting against sunburn when used correctly,” said Kerry M. Hanson, a UCR senior research scientist. “This means using a sunscreen with a high sun protection factor and applying it uniformly on the skin. Our data show, however, that if coverage at the skin surface is low, the UV filters in sunscreens that have penetrated into the epidermis can potentially do more harm than good. More advanced sunscreens that ensure that the UV-filters stay on the skin surface are needed; such filters would reduce the level of UV-induced ROS. Another solution may be to mix the UV-filters with antioxidants since antioxidants have been shown to reduce UV-induced ROS levels in the skin.”

11 Using scented aloe

Though aloe can relieve the pain experienced from a sunburn, you must pay attention to the kind of aloe you’re using. Scented aloe can be just as bad as fragrances and colognes for your skin, so the American Academy of Dermatology recommends using unscented aloe vera to help treat a sunburn. Just watch out for any ingredients like petroleum, benzocaine, or lidocaine, as they too can cause irritation.

12 Wearing tight clothing

If you’re suffering from a sunburn, pack away the tight clothing. According to Solomon, tight clothing traps the heat from your sunburn, which promotes painful swelling and inflammation.

“Your body is trying to respond to the trauma by increasing blood flow to the area to help with healing,” Solomon says. “This results in redness, warmth, and inflammation to the area. Wearing tight clothes could amplify the response, which could lead to more intense swelling and blisters.”

13 Applying more sunscreen

Got a sunburn that’s blistering? Well, as most people know, popping those blisters are a no-go, but what about applying more sunscreen? According to Janet Prystowsky, a board-certified dermatologist from New York, that’s also something you should probably avoid.

“Sunscreen can be applied if there are no blisters, but, if there are blisters, sunscreen won’t help much and may be irritating to underlying tissues if the blisters pop,” Prystowsky says.

14 Not drinking enough water

Staying hydrated is always important, but sunburn sufferers especially should make sure they are increasing their fluid intake. According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, sunburns draw fluid to the skin’s surface and away from the rest of the body, which can lead to dehydration.

“It's important to rehydrate by drinking extra liquids, including water and sports drinks that help to replenish electrolytes, immediately and while your skin heals,” says Jeffrey Brackeen, a Skin Cancer Foundation dermatologist. And if you need reasons to avoid getting burned in the first place, check out these 20 Ways a Sunburn Harms Your Overall Health.

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