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Are You Making These Common Mistakes After A Bad Sunburn?



By Dr. Sheel Desai Solomon

Lord knows I've had a lot of bad sunburns in my life and that's why I have sun damage on my arms, legs, chest and face. Here are a few tips that might help you the next time you find yourself sunburned.

Unless you have been living under a rock, you know the importance of SPF and re-applying it. There are times when, despite your best efforts, you still manage to get burned. Perhaps you were careless, and after too many margaritas forgot to re-apply your sunblock. Now, you are literally burned by your day of fun in the sun. Before you do anything to put yourself out of your

stinging, burning agony, read these tips so you know what NOT to do to soothe a sunburn.

Wearing Cologne

Some cologne may contain ingredients that make you more prone to burning. "Oil of bergamot is especially notorious for this," explains Dr. Solomon "and can cause a severe, blistering reaction when it's on your skin and exposed to the sun." It's become rarer in the past few years since many fragrance companies started stripping the ingredient from their products. Other perfume ingredients and essential oils, like rosemary and lavender oils, can make your skin more sensitive to the rays, too, Dr. Solomon adds. To play it safe, avoid spraying any scents onto your skin before you go outside.

Medications

Taking an anti-inflammatory medication, like acetaminophen or ibuprofen, can help soothe your skin once you're sunburned. However, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), like ibuprofen and naproxen, can also leave you more vulnerable to getting burned in the first place. Dr. Solomon explains, "That's because certain medications contain photosensitizing agents. Those molecules will absorb the sun's UV rays and release them back into your skin, which damages and kills skin cells." However, NSAIDs aren't the only ones that can raise your risk of getting fried. "There is a whole slew of meds out there that can leave your skin more sensitive to sun's rays," says Dr. Solomon "meaning you need to take extra precautions before spending time outdoors." Common ones include topical acne medications like benzoyl peroxide and salicylic acid, antihistamines, and antibiotics. Even OTC supplements like St. John's Wort can make you burn more easily. Avoiding direct sunlight after applying or taking these medications is your best bet, but if you need to head outside, Dr. Solomon suggests protecting your skin with SPF 30 sunscreen and covering up with long sleeves, hats.

Taking Hot Showers

When your skin gets a little too toasted, you may notice that it tends to feel dry as it heals. Even if you're not in physical pain, taking hot showers can strip your skin of essential oils, which can dry it out even further and make it more sensitive, explains Dr. Solomon.

“This may lead to blistering and possibly prolong the healing process.” On top of that, hot water isn't going to feel great, even on a mild sunburn that didn't feel too bad to begin with. While cold showers typically feel uncomfortable, sticking to lukewarm or cool showers when you're burned will ease discomfort. The temperature should be no warmer than what you would expect from a heated pool, which is around 84 degrees.

Wearing Tight Clothing

Wearing tight clothing over sunburnt skin is not advised, because inflammation is setting in. “Your body is trying to respond to the trauma by increasing blood flow to the area to help with healing. This results in redness, warmth, and inflammation to the area,” says Dr. Solomon. Wearing tight clothes could amplify the response, which could lead to more intense swelling and blisters. Alternatively, you can avoid sunburns altogether and use the best sunscreen for your skin type.

Don't Use Scented Aloe

Aloe has anti-inflammatory properties and is suitable for your skin after you get a sunburn. However, using a scented aloe can irritate the skin even more. Dr. Solomon suggests using a fragrance-free aloe or using aloe directly from an aloe plant. However, the most beneficial treatment of all is to avoid sunburn in the first place.

Don't Cover that Burn With Makeup

Even though your sunburn might look bad, avoid covering it up with makeup. “The only way the burn will heal is if you let your skin breathe,” says Dr. Solomon. “Introducing various makeups through dirty sponges or brushes will only increase your risk for infection or allergic reaction, which will ultimately make it all worse.”

Don't Pop Your Blisters

Similar to not peeling your skin, you should never pop blisters. “That extra bubble of skin serves a fundamental purpose in protecting the wound,” says Dr. Solomon. “If a blister hurts severely, apply a cream-based unscented aloe vera.”

Not Drinking Enough Water

Sunburns dehydrate you from the inside out, so you really should be drinking 8 to 10 glasses of water a day to rejuvenate the skin.

Exfoliating

While scrubbing dead skin off your body helps your skin, it's one of the worst things you can do on a sunburn. When your skin is burnt from the sun, exfoliating only exposes the damaged layer of skin, even more, causing pain and further irritation, explains Dr. Solomon. Instead, use a gentle moisturizer or mask to treat damaged skin.

Don't Use Coconut Oil or Butter

You may have heard before that lathering butter or coconut oil will soothe your burn, but it's a myth. The skin is hot and needs to cool down, applying a fat-based product onto your skin will not only clog the pores and stop the healing process, but it might also aggravate inflammation. "Coconut oil and butter are great for moisturizing the skin in other instances," says Dr. Solomon, "but when it comes to a burn, you should wait until the skin cools to use it."

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