

10 tips for treating sunburned skin



We know all about sun safety — the importance of wearing sunscreen and reapplying often. But sometimes, despite our efforts, sunburns happen. Here are tips from a board-certified dermatologist of what to do to soothe a sunburn.

Don't wear cologne or essential oils

Some cologne may contain 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," says Dr. Sheel Desai Solomon, a board-certified Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina dermatologist. "Other perfume ingredients and essential oils, like rosemary and lavender oils, can make your skin more sensitive to the rays, too. To play it safe, avoid spraying any scents onto your skin before you go outside.

Be mindful of that medication

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 this is because they 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. And 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," she says, including OTC supplements like St. John's Wort.

Take tepid showers

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. 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.

Don't wear 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.

Use only unscented 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. Use a fragrance-free aloe or using aloe directly from an aloe plant.

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."

Leave the blisters alone

Similar to not peeling your skin, you should never pop blisters. That extra bubble of skin serves a fundamental purpose in protecting the wound, explains Dr. Solomon. "

Drink plenty of 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.

Don't exfoliate

Scrubbing dead skin off your body is 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. Instead, use a gentle moisturizer or mask to treat damaged skin.

Do not 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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