

sunburn and its effect on the skin

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We've all done it, stayed out in the sun just a bit too long, didn't bother to reapply sun screen and as a result suffered the burning consequences later. We know it's wrong but where's the real harm? Do we really consider the irreversible and catastrophic damage that has been done to our skin?

Why do we burn?

A burn is the skin's response to extreme UV exposure and indicates severe damage. In as little as 10 minutes of intense exposure the skin sets into motion a system of defence against this enemy. The first indication of damage is the initial visible redness. This is the body's inflammatory response in situations requiring repair and is a result of dilating blood vessels. Inflammation may also lead to swelling and sensitivity of nerve endings, hence it's so painful to touch. The skin then starts to lose moisture, and a feeling of dehydration and tightness sets in. Slowly skin cells start to thicken in order to provide protection and melanin pigment will be produced (tanning) all in an attempt to stop the UV from penetrating through to the deeper layers and damaging our precious DNA within our cells.

The body copes with minimal amounts of damage but if exposure is greater than the body's ability to repair, consequences occur such as loss of elasticity, breakdown of critical dermal proteins and DNA damage. These all result in skin discolouration, loose skin, age spots, wrinkles, thickened skin and of course skin cancer.

Why does the skin peel?

Peeling after sunburn is your body's way of getting rid of the damaged cells that are at risk of "losing control" and becoming cancerous. Due to this danger, all damaged cells are instructed to commit suicide by internal repair mechanisms. This mass suicide of cells results in whole layers of damaged skin peeling off, to be replaced by new cells underneath those layers.

I have a sunburn, what should I do now?

Drink plenty of water as you may be dehydrated. If the skin is severely blistered then seek help from a medical practitioner. Otherwise it is important to take down the inflammation and try to reduce damage to the deeper layers of your skin.

Take a very cool bath (no products added) and then blot skin dry. Avoid greasy creams; they prevent the skin from cooling and will make the situation worse. Rather apply a soothing after-sun gel generously to red areas and then stay out of the sun and the heat. Look for ingredients such as Clove, Liquorice, Lavender, Cucumber and Yucca to reduce irritation, pain and redness induced. Also look out for an incredible ingredient called Japanese Alder to accelerate the repair of UV induced DNA damage. Couple this with ingredients such as Algae and Hyaluronic Acid to rehydrate the skin and you should be well on your way to a calmer skin.

Avoid further sun exposure, as your skin is still trying to heal. The skin is a great record keeper and even with a good after-sun product, irreparable damage is likely to have occurred in the form of future premature ageing. Think twice next time you decide to go unprotected your immune system is listening!