Sunburn Treatment

Self-Care at Home

Home care starts before a sunburn. If you are prepared before going out in the sun, you probably won't need these tips and techniques.

- Immediate self-care is aimed at stopping the UV radiation.
  - Get out of the sun
  - Cover exposed skin
  - Get out of the tanning bed

- Relief of the discomfort becomes important.
  - Medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen are useful, especially when started early.
  - For mild sunburn, cool compresses with equal parts of milk and water may suffice. You may also use cold compresses with Burow solution. You can buy this at a drugstore. Dissolve 1 packet in 1 pint of water. Soak gauze or a soft clean cloth in it. Gently wring out the cloth and apply to the sunburned area for 15-20 minutes. Change or refresh the cloth and solution every 2-3 hours.
  - Anyone raised in a beach community knows the secret of aloe-based lotions. There are many commercially available types. Ask the pharmacist at your local drugstore. Tearing apart your aloe plant in the yard and applying the cool jellylike substance inside the leaves is no longer necessary.
  - Cool (not ice cold) baths may help. Avoid bath salts, oils, and perfumes because these may produce sensitivity reactions. Avoid
scrubbing the skin or shaving the skin. Use soft towels to gently dry yourself. Don't rub. Use a light, fragrance-free skin moisturizer.

- Avoid lotions that contain topical anesthetic medications because you can become sensitized and then allergic to that medicine.
- Obviously, stay out of the sun while you are sunburned.

**Medical Treatment**

Silver sulfadiazine (1% cream, Thermazene) can be used for treatment of sunburn with appropriate cautions about use on the face.

- If your case is mild and not life threatening, the doctor may simply suggest plenty of fluids, aspirin, or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs).
- Additional topical measures such as cool compresses, Burow solution soaks, or high-quality moisturizing creams and lotions may be prescribed.
- If your case is severe enough (sun poisoning), oral steroid therapy (cortisone like medications) may be prescribed for several days. Steroid creams placed on the skin show minimal to no benefit.
- Stronger pain-relieving medication may be prescribed in certain cases.
- If you have blistering, steroids may be withheld to avoid an increased risk of infection. If you are dehydrated or suffering from heat stress, IV fluids will be given, and you may be admitted to the hospital. People with very severe cases may be transferred to the hospital's burn unit.


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