

Summertime, Sunburn Time



By Jean-Jacques Dugoua, ND

Have you ever made the mistake of wandering outside on a sunny day without your protective clothing or sunscreen? Next thing you know, hours later, your skin is bright red and the next few days are spent in equal parts of pain and peeling. Sun means fun, but it also means sunburn.

Sunburn Season

A sunburn is the burning or discoloration produced on the skin by over-exposure to UV-B (Ultraviolet B) rays from the sun. Symptoms of sunburn appear one to 24 hours after exposure and vary depending on the severity of the burn. Usually the sunburned person experiences pain and sensitivity to touch, and their skin may appear red, swollen, blistered or dried.

The US Federal Drug Administration (FDA) recommends the use of sunscreens with SPF (sun protection factor) 15 or above. The use of protective clothing, such as hats and wind breakers, are also recommended. Did you know that vitamins and herbs could also protect your skin against the sun?

Green Tea

Green tea is consumed as a popular beverage worldwide particularly in Asian countries like China, Korea, Japan and India. Because of its anti-inflammatory and anti-carcinogenic properties, green tea has been shown to have protective effects against UV light when used on the skin or ingested. Based on these results, many pharmaceutical and cosmetic companies are supplementing their skin care products with green tea extracts.

A study was conducted in the Department of Dermatology of Case Western Reserve in Cleveland on the effects of green tea during acute sun (UV light) exposure. The skin of normal volunteers was treated with an extract of green tea. Thirty minutes later, the treated sites were exposed to doses of simulated sunlight. The skin was then examined for clinical signs of redness, presence of sunburn cells and UV-induced DNA damage. The researchers observed that the skin treated with green tea extracts had reduced numbers of sunburn cells, had less redness and had reduced DNA damage. The researchers concluded that green tea extract is an effective preventative agent for many of the adverse effects of sunlight and may thus serve as a natural alternative for sun protection.

Vitamin C and E

Antioxidants protect the skin from sunburn by offsetting the damage produced by UV rays. Studies have shown that the combination of vitamin C and vitamin E have significant protective effect against UV rays.

Aloe

Aloe is another popular remedy for minor burns, including sun burns.