

[IMAGE]

## **Get Some Sun (But Not Too Much)**

By Julie T. Chen, MD

As we start to get more daylight hours for us to enjoy the sunshine, I inevitably get questions from my patients about whether it's better to go with lighter sunscreen and get more vitamin D or to just worry more about skin cancer and wear heavier sunscreen.

My answer to my patients is to always wear heavier sunscreen. The reason is because it's easy enough to get vitamin D from supplementation; why risk your skin health for it?

Even though vitamin D is a hormone in the body and plays a significant role in many physiological functions—including, but not limited to, the prevention of falls, fractures, and cancers—skin health is equally important. Since we are able to bring our vitamin D levels up easily without significant adverse effects with vitamin D supplementation, why risk the health of our skin?

However, this does not mean that avoiding sunlight altogether is a good thing. While skin cancer and premature aging of the skin is an issue with persistent sunlight exposure, the bright side of sun exposure is that it brightens our mood and allows us to be outdoors more for exercise.

Sun exposure improves our overall mood. Those with Seasonal Affective Disorder suffer from depression or low mood when they don't get enough sun. For these patients, consider getting a sun lamp for winter time to use at home. But during the spring and summer months, it's better to wear sunscreen and venture outdoors for physical activity so as to improve mood, metabolism, and overall health.

Many people aren't aware that exercise is more than just about losing weight. When we exercise our body, our organs get exercise as well. Those who engage in regular exercise have healthier circulation, mental clarity, cardiovascular function, lung function, sugar and cholesterol metabolism, muscle functioning, and positive mood.

It is also seen in many studies that exercising outdoors provides additional health benefits because we are calmer and our mood is better when we are around nature. So, let's learn more about skincare so that we can fully utilize our time in the sun this spring and summer season. When you are able to fully utilize the

benefits of sunlight while protecting your skin health, you're able to be more active, improve your mood, and avoid skin damage. So, let's learn more about our sun protection options.

In regards to sun protection, I always recommend that my patients use wide spectrum sun protection factor (SPF) that blocks both UVA and UVB rays. With SPF 50, you will be getting about 98% blockage of UVB. At SPF 100, you'll be only getting 1% more, at 99% blockage of UVB rays. So, most people are fine just using SPF 30 to SPF 50 if that's what you have or are used to using.

The main take-home point regarding skin health this summer is to:

1. Make sure you use sunblock/sunscreen to protect your skin.
2. Use ample quantity to provide adequate coverage.
3. Reapply during the daytime to account for loss of effectiveness from sweating, friction, and other factors.
4. Get out into the sun to benefit your mood and overall health.
5. Ask your doctor about vitamin D supplementation if you are low and about sun lamps if you feel gloomy without adequate sun exposure.

Play safe this spring and summer and enjoy the sun!

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**Dr. Julie T. Chen** is board-certified in internal medicine and fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, Calif. She is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of Web sites and nonprofit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates various healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more, visit [www.makinghealthyez.com](http://www.makinghealthyez.com).

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