

Fun in the Sun

Posted on

Have fun in the sun but beware of its power.



The tropical sunshine is what attracts most tourists to Sri Lanka. While enjoying our sun, here is some advice you should pay heed to in order to enjoy your stay to the fullest.

Sunburn is the least of the dangers faced by sunbathers. It can be prevented by using sunscreen protective lotions and by gradual exposure instead of prolonged and continued basking in the sun. Sun-tanning is not, unfortunately, a harmless holiday pursuit and, contrary to what we have always believed, a glowing, healthy sun-tan is a sign of potential skin damage to a dermatologist.

Natural sunlight contains a mixture of ultraviolet (UV) rays of which two types, UVB and UV A, affect our skin. The UVB rays cause sunburn. UVA rays do not burn but stimulate a tan. Both can damage the skin without burning it.

Although UV A rays (the rays emitted by tanning machines, lamps and sunbeds) are milder than UVB and have therefore been seen as “safe”, they also penetrate the skin. They may be responsible for damaging the collagen and elastin fibres which give the skin its strength and flexibility. UV A is also thought to affect the skin’s inbuilt repair system which enables cells to renew themselves correctly.

The result of accumulative exposure to sunlight, which may not show up for 10 to 20 years, is a prematurely lined, coarse and sagging skin which is in danger of developing skin cancer. Even moderate exposure has been shown to cause degenerative signs in sensitive skin.

Those most at risk from sun-related skin cancers are people with skin types one and two, who work outdoors, live in sunny climates, or have sunbathed intemperately and repeatedly over the years. Getting sunburnt frequently puts you at risk too. Other problems connected with over-exposure to sun are development of chloasma

(melasma), prickly heat and photosensitivity.

Natives of the tropics who are darker have great advantages over white skinned people in sun exposure. As melanin (the pigmenting substance) is distributed more evenly and produced faster in black skin, it can absorb more UV light (30 percent more than white skin), thus minimizing the damage to underlying cells. The thicker surface layer of skin gives more protection while a higher concentration of sweat and sebaceous glands results in swifter skin cooling. The secretions from those glands filter the rays more efficiently. Though it is less likely, black skin can burn if unprotected and unused to strong sunlight.

Sun Guide

Sunburn results in blisters, peeling and pain and can damage both deep and superficial layers of skin as well as increasing the likelihood of developing skin cancers if it occurs repeatedly.

If it happens, first cool down the burn to prevent it penetrating still further into the skin. Sponge burnt areas repeatedly with either natural yoghurt, calamine, a solution of milk and water, or apple-cider vinegar. Or relax in a tea or chamomile infused bath for at least 15 minutes. Burns will immediately feel less sore as their heat dissipates.

Do not apply creams to the skin until it is completely cool, because creams hold in the heat. When it is cool, apply moisturizer, preferably one containing a healing substance such as aloe vera, allantoin, chamomile or honey.

In cases of really severe sunburn, especially if accompanied by sunstroke, consult a doctor. You may be prescribed anti-inflammatory (swelling-reducing) drugs and pain killer which will release some of the discomfort and swelling.

Safer Tanning

Expose your skin to the sun gradually, protected with the correct sunscreen for your skin type. Even if you are already tanned, protection is vital. You can only stay in the sun for twice as long as when untanned, before burning starts.

Remember, too, that some factors can aggravate the sun's effect on the skin. Snow, sand, concrete, water and reflective surfaces all reflect UV light very strongly. You can burn even under a wide-brimmed hat or parasol.

Sunlight is especially powerful in a high altitude, at sea, and near the Equator. Up to 50 percent of UV rays can filter 'through an overcast sky. Try to sunbathe in the early morning or late afternoon when the UVB rays are less strong. Always use a water-resistant sunscreen when swimming and reapply it at regular intervals.

Avoid wearing scent or cosmetics when sunbathing; some ingredients cause a skin reaction when in contact with UV rays. If you are taking any medication, check with your doctor before sun exposure.

Certain drugs, cosmetics and food can cause a photosensitive reaction. Limit your alcohol intake.

Some skin conditions (rosacea skin cancers) should either never be exposed to sunlight or else be protected by a total sunblock; check with a dermatologist. High intensity sunbathing is the most damaging. Research in Australia has shown that holiday makers who cram all their sunbathing into an annual two weeks, run a greater risk of developing skin cancer than farmers exposed to sun all year round. So, to have a pleasant holiday here in the sun, do not overdo it.



Expose your skin to the sun gradually.