

Sun Protection

Well, summer is finally on its way. Although many of us love the wonderful days of a Michigan summer, we must not forget that for as therapeutic and beautiful as a sunny day may be, it also holds a fair amount of danger, against which protection is necessary. Sunlight exposes us to ultraviolet rays, which penetrate into the skin, and cause tanning. These rays also cause sunburns, heavy freckling, wrinkles, discoloration, and skin cell damage that can lead to skin cancer.

So what is an outdoor lover to do? Don't worry, with careful exposure to moderate sunlight lovely, healthy mature skin is still possible. Notice that the key word just mentioned was MODERATE! Extensive sunbathing and artificial tanning will give a beautiful bronze color as a young person, but with age, people often find that the skin becomes leathery, freckled and wrinkled, causing them to appear older than they are. Sunscreens and sunblocks can help. The difference is that sunscreens have chemicals that react with the skin and prevent absorption of some of the harmful sun rays. Sunblocks have physical agents that actually prevent some of the rays from ever reaching the skin, kind of like being covered with a layer of protection that the sun cannot even penetrate.

When choosing a sun protection item, start with a sunscreen or sunblock with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 30 or higher. Choose an agent with protection against ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) rays. This is usually clearly indicated on the packaging. It should be applied 30 minutes before going outside, on all of the areas that will be exposed. Reapplication should occur every 2-3 hours while outside – especially after swimming or heavy sweating. Many sunscreens are “waterproof” or “water resistant”, but even these agents need reapplication after swimming. Apply the sunscreen as a thin layer. Do not rub it in too much, or it will be thinned out so much that it may not fully protect the skin.

Just because a sunscreen is on, does not mean that anything goes in the sun. Try to avoid long periods outside when the sun is most likely to cause burning (10:00am – 2:00 pm), and be especially careful on boats or water, because the reflective surface of water increases the exposure. Don't forget to cover any sensitive areas on the body with clothing – loose fitting cotton, wide brimmed hats and a little shade work very well.

Last but not least, don't forget that even while you are protecting yourself, you can still have fun, and enjoy the best Michigan summer ever.