

## Sunshine Off My Shoulders

By Debby Ridgell

I have a vivid memory of the first time I heard the old John Denver tune, *Sunshine on My Shoulders*. Lying miserably in bed, recovering from severe sunburn caused by a full day of waterskiing without sunscreen, I remember thinking, “Johnny, sunshine most definitely does not make *me* happy today.”

While recent research suggests that limited daily exposure to sunshine can be beneficial – 10 minutes or so a day helps the body create Vitamin D, which assists in the absorption of calcium for healthier bones – it is still recommended that sun worshippers employ certain safety precautions while enjoying those glorious rays to prevent skin and eye damage later on down the road:

- Remember that damaging UV rays are at their strongest between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. each day, so it is best to limit exposure to the sun during those hours.
- Use sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 (30 for children). The Sun Protection Factor is how much longer you can be in the sun without burning if you are wearing protection. If you would normally burn after, say, 10 minutes, then applying a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 will give you 15 times the protection – or 150 minutes.
- Apply sunscreen and lip balm liberally every 2 hours – and don’t forget those tricky spots like ears, feet and neck. Reapply sunscreen after swimming.
- Protect your eyes by wearing UV protective sunglasses to reduce the chances of cataracts and other eye ailments.
- Cover up with a hat and tightly-woven protective clothing if you know you’re going to be in the sun for a prolonged period.
- Seek shade whenever possible.

All of these strategies will be useful in preventing sunburn. But what do you do after the fact? Mild sunburn can be treated with:

- Aspirin or ibuprofen
- Cool compresses or soaks in the tub – oatmeal baths work wonders
- Hydration – drink plenty of water to replenish lost fluid, which is common with sunburn
- After-sun creams and lotions like calamine and aloe vera, but avoid greasy creams as they tend to trap the heat and make symptoms worse

So there you have it. May this summer’s “drops of golden sun” be good to you!

Information for this article was obtained from the following websites: <http://kidshealth.org>, [www.sunsafetyalliance.org](http://www.sunsafetyalliance.org), and [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).