

VENICE PLASTIC SURGERY

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Cosmetic, Reconstructive, Face, Breast, and Hand Surgery

Sunburns

Sunburns may occur anywhere in the world including the North Pole. The sun angle may be lower up north but in winter the sun is multiplied by reflection from the snow. While boating in Florida a large brim hat is helpful but does not prevent exposure to the radiation reflected from the water. People at the beach think they do not need sunblock as they are under an umbrella. This is not true. The sand and water are very reflective.

Solar radiation burns the skin very much like a fire does. You may get a superficial first degree burn. This results in painful redness and a few days later maybe some superficial peeling. A second degree burn is deeper and produces blistering. This may occur a day or two after the burn. At this point medical attention is needed. In a third degree burn all layers of the skin are damaged. Third degree burns do not blister. You may be fooled because areas may be mixed, some second degree blistered areas with third degree burns. Third degree burns from any source are usually less painful than first or second degree burns because the sensitive nerve endings are damaged.

Small third degree burns are often ignored by people for a few days or a week or more because they are not sore. They become infected and that is when medical attention is sought. Indirectly heated objects are a source of burns too. Several patients required skin grafts from burns on their buttocks. One was just sitting intermittently on his hot roof cleaning gutters. A rapid third degree burn occurred and there was almost no pain. Skin grafts may be needed.

Sun exposure is more damaging than just what you see on the skin. Sun screens do not stop X-Rays and Gamma radiation. These are also present but in lesser amounts than the UVA and UVB types of sun radiation that sun blocking agents may suppress. I tell patients that if they lied down on the beach with a piece of X-Ray film under them for a day they would get a picture of their skeleton. This occurs by the radiation that goes right through you. Who knows, maybe internal cancers are in part caused by sun exposure as well.

When I give skin cancer lectures to city workers, at lecture halls and at the HealthPark I tell people to stand or sit under the eaves of buildings or the shade of their trucks. These are thick objects that stop most of the direct radiation types. The indirect or reflected radiation will still occur. Anything you do to diminish exposure is of benefit.

So how do we protect ourselves? Use common sense. Do not work in the middle of the day on a hot roof. Wear protective clothing. It is OK to wear pants while playing golf. The professionals do it! Use sun screening agents. Let us talk about these.

There are two types to choose from chemical absorbers and reflective blockers. Some newer chemical absorbers are said to protect you from both UVA and UVB radiation but only the blockers as zinc and titanium provide full spectrum coverage. It will only protect you when you put it on. Use plenty, about a shot glass full. You need to put this stuff on thick, especially the chemical absorbing types. I have recently read that SPF 15 is no longer considered good enough. We should be using SPF 30 or better. This has always been my belief. Finally, I recommend the use of products labeled as hypoallergenic, non-stinging and fragrance free. Personally I use at least a 30 SPF soft cream that is labeled for kids. I figure it is less harsh on the skin.

Many of my older patients say they would have taken better care of themselves if they knew they would live this long. What's your excuse?

**The above represents the opinion of A. E. Haas, M.D.
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Just call us directly. No referral needed unless required by your insurance company

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