

## Protection from the sun

### Sun, sun protection, and sunburn – the dos and don'ts

**By now, everyone knows that too much sunlight – and too much ultraviolet – is bad for you. It can burn your skin, it affects your immune system, and it increases your risk of skin cancer. So it's important to limit the amount of time you spend in the sun and to use sunscreen with a high sun protection factor.**

#### UV radiation or UV Index – how does that work again?

The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (the RIVM in Dutch) continuously measures the amount of ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun, which it expresses as a UV Index. The sun's strength varies from day to day – even from hour to hour – depending on factors such as the amount of particulates in the air. In cloudy weather, the UV Index can still be high. It is indicated on a scale from 1 to 10. The higher the value, the better we should protect our skin against sunburn. In the Netherlands, you can check the next day's UV Index on the website of the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI) to prepare yourself well.

Sure, a little UV radiation from the sun is good for you because it helps us produce vitamin D, and that builds healthy bones. Your body produces vitamin D as soon as you are in the sun. For most people with light skin, it is sufficient to have your hands and face unprotected in the sun for between 15 and 30 minutes a day to produce enough vitamin D. You won't produce more vitamin D if you get more sunlight on your skin.

Too much UV radiation is not good. Sunburn is the main cause of skin cancer in the long run. Children are particularly sensitive to this. Burning at a young age doubles the chance of getting skin cancer at a later age.

#### UV radiation at tropical and subtropical destinations

At tropical and subtropical locations, the sun shines more often than in the Netherlands, and the sunlight is more intense. Around the equator, the UV Index is higher because the sun reaches the highest elevation angle (perpendicular to the earth's surface) there and the ozone layer is thinner. So, the closer you travel to the equator, the more UV radiation there is per square metre.

## Protection against the sun: What measures can (and do) you want to take?

- First of all, use sunscreen – a lot and often.
  - Apply a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 to your skin, even if your skin is already “used to the sun” and even if you are sitting in the shade. The lighter your skin type, the higher the protection factor you should use. So, use at least SPF 50 on light skin.
  - You should only be able to get about seven applications out of a standard 200 ml bottle of sunscreen. In other words, apply it several times a day.
  - If you use sunscreen and DEET (mosquito repellent) at the same time, apply the sunscreen first and wait half an hour to apply the DEET. Remember that DEET can have a negative effect on the effect of sunscreen.
- In any case, stay out of the sun as much as possible during the sunniest hours of the day – between 11.30 AM and 3.30 PM. This also applies to reflected sunlight (under a parasol on the beach).
- Cover your skin with light, airy clothing – such as cotton or linen – that absorbs moisture easily. Wear a sun hat or cap.
- Protect your eyes with sunglasses. Make sure that your glasses have a 100% UV protection or a UV filter of 400.

## One last piece of advice

Check your skin regularly. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the Netherlands. Be alert for the appearance of new spots and spots that change. There are several apps that can help you. If you have any doubt, contact your doctor immediately.

## Apps (in Dutch)

- Learn to recognize the signs early: Get the [SkinVision](#) app.
- Get personal sun advice and a sunscreen reminder app: [UV Radar](#) app.

## For more information (in Dutch) visit:

- [rivm.nl/uv](http://rivm.nl/uv)
- [kwf.nl/zon](http://kwf.nl/zon)
- [stichting Melanoom](#)
- [NOS: waarom je nu sneller verbrandt dan in 1980](#)

