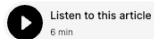


HEALTH > WELLBEING

The terrifying trend towards tanning

We need a line in the sand on tanning: sunburn can lead to problems for life, not just cute images for TikTok.

By RITU GUPTA



While sunshine is a boost to wellbeing, skin cancer is not: we have been warned about the dangers since the education campaigns of the 1980s. Picture: Getty Images

Gift this article 84 Comments

4 min read 5:00am September 07, 2025. Updated 2 hours ago

Tan lines are now trending on TikTok. It seems terrifying but young women in particular want to slather themselves with oil and get a tan and have bikini lines or even shapes marked on their burnt skin.

There are, astonishingly, social media influencers who say they never wear sunscreen and that the sun has healing rays and contributes to a feeling of wellbeing. Sunscreen, they say, is toxic.

What is going on?



Advertisement

Who would think wearing sunscreen in Australia would be topical? No pun intended. Surely, it is just the norm here. And it has been since the 1981 slip slop, slap sunscreen campaign began, extending to include seek the shade and slide on some sunnies.

Children, particularly in primary school, have learned that wearing a hat and sunscreen every day and reapplying their sunscreen is part of life in Australia, where we are world leaders in the incidence of melanoma.

Melanoma is the third most [commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia](#), making up 11 per cent of all cancers here. Some studies attribute five deaths a day in Australia to melanoma. These are very worrying statistics.

It is well established that sunscreen helps to prevent melanoma. It also helps to prevent basal cell cancer and squamous cell cancer, and also skin ageing, pigmentation and pre-cancerous sun spots.

Why are we even discussing the use of sunscreen?

There has been recent controversy. Consumer advocate Choice recently conducted independent testing of 20 commonly used sunscreens, with terrifying results. Only four of the 20 sunscreens lived up to their published SPF (sun protection factor). And 16 of the 20 sunscreens, even allowing for a variance of 20 per cent, were well below their published SPF.

The sunscreen that performed the poorest, Ultra Violette, was found to have an SPF of just four despite being advertised as SPF50. It has been pulled off shop shelves because further testing with multiple labs showed a huge variability in the SPF.

Several other manufacturers have now voluntarily “paused” the sale of some sunscreens, including Found My Skin, Outside Beauty & Skincare SPF50+ Mineral Primer, Naked Sundays, and Endota Mineral Protect SPF50 and Natural Clear Zinc SPF50+. The ABC reported some brands used the same manufacturer as Ultra Violette, with the same or similar base ingredients.

All of this uncertainty could contribute to a feeling of mistrust in the claims made for sunscreen. But please be assured that wearing sunscreen, whether it's SPF15, SPF30 or SPF50, is better than not wearing sunscreen. And it's still important to use enough and to reapply.

What are the other concerns about sunscreen?



On Whitehaven Beach in Queensland: if you are concerned about the effects of sunscreen on water quality and coral reefs, choose a “reef-safe” product, says Dr Gupta. Picture: iStock

We know that SPF testing is challenging. It's not an easy thing to measure, and the Therapeutics Goods Association is looking into what should be done to regulate this.

Until now, sunscreen manufacturers could use their own testing to back up SPF claims for their products and there was no oversight by any professional body.

But others are worried not about SPF but about the environmental impacts of sunscreen. There have been studies showing that some ingredients in sunscreen can negatively impact

the marine environment but more studies are needed especially ones that take into account

real world conditions and the real world concentration of sunscreen ingredients in the

water. In any case, if you are concerned about this, there are “reef-safe” sunscreens that

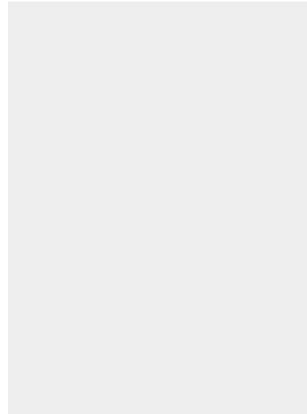
are readily available.

A third common concern about sunscreen is that it contains nano particles. Sunscreen in Australia contains micronised particles, not nano particles, and there is no evidence to show that nano particles penetrate through healthy skin, only through diseased skin that has a broken or

abnormal barrier caused, for example, by eczema, dermatitis or some sort of inflammation.

Dangers of poor information

The good sun habits that young children develop under the guidance of their parents, daycare carers and in primary school are in danger of being lost as these same children go on to their teenage years under the influence of social media. Contrary to the messages on TikTok that sunscreen is toxic or contains dangerous chemicals, these products are extremely well researched. The ingredients are very safe. The TGA is looking into some [specific ingredients, homosalate and oxybenzone](#), to assess if they have any effect on the endocrine (hormone) system. There have been some effects at high concentrations in animal studies but doses in sunscreen are very much less than this and no effect has been seen in clinical studies in humans.



Star or heart shapes are popular to create outlines on burnt skin. Picture: TikTok

The take home message is, wear your sunscreen. Wear enough sunscreen. Try to reapply your sunscreen at least twice a day.

And don't worry about vitamin D. To get enough vitamin D, you really only need 15 to 20 minutes of sunlight outside the hours of 11am to 3pm in summer and inside 11am to 3pm in winter. You can get enough sun exposure on your forearms; you don't need it on your face.

Stick with the facts

As a population, we should focus on what we know to be facts. We know Australia is a world leader in melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer. We know wearing sunscreen reduces melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer. Rather than becoming a statistic and succumbing to melanoma or to other skin cancers and to skin ageing and pigmentation, let's wear our sunscreen, and teach our kids and our teens that slip slop, slap, seek and slide is just as relevant today as it was in 1981.

Dr Ritu Gupta, MBBS (Hons), PhD, FACD, is a medical and cosmetic dermatologist. Visit her [website](#) for more information.

Instagram: [@dr_ritu_dermatologist](#)

This column is published for information purposes only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice and should not be relied on as a substitute for independent professional advice about your personal health or a medical condition from your doctor or other qualified health professional.

MORE ON THIS STORY



Eight things a dermatologist wants you to know about skin cancer

By DR RITU GUPTA



Waging war: Cancer pioneer Georgina Long's fight to be heard

By FIONA HARARI



Breakthrough: Trial offers miracle 'cure' for advanced melanoma

By NATASHA ROBINSON

Read related topics:

Cancer

Health

Skin



MORE IN WELLBEING >





The terrifying trend towards tanning

We need a line in the sand on tanning: sunburn can lead to problems for life, not just cute images for TikTok.

By RITU GUPTA



Finding happiness through mindfulness, gratitude and 'paying it forward'

Can we think our way to greater happiness? Finding peace inside can help reduce stress and anxiety and lift our wellbeing. Here's how to practise kindness and gratitude.

By STEPHEN LUNN



How to live with meaning and purpose – the role of faith

Living with faith can shift our perspective from simply aspiring to a comfortable life, to finding fulfilment and joy.

By ARCHBISHOP PETER COMENSOLI

TRENDING



Beijing has post-parade tantrum at Australia over Japan ties

China erupted over Penny Wong and Richard Marles' 'incomprehensible' decision to 'provoke China' at a meeting in Tokyo two days after Xi Jinping's military parade.

By WILL GLASGOW



Full horror revealed as judge demolishes lies

We'll never know why the jury convicted Erin Patterson but now we have a clear picture of the pitiless lies of a violent offender who intended to slaughter five people.

By CLAIRE HARVEY



Callous shark apologists ignore lives lost

The greenie feeding frenzy began within minutes of the tragic news of Mercury Psillakis being killed on Saturday, an appalling indictment on modern Australia.

By FRED PAWLE



Liberal rift widens as Hawke insists on apology from Price

Liberal frontbencher Alex Hawke has denied he berated a member of fellow senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price's team and says she still needs to apologise to Indian-Australians after suggesting many migrants were on welfare and voted Labor.

By NOAH YIM



Like Europe, Australia has lost its mojo. We are trapped in a doom loop

The state is growing larger while private enterprise is shrinking. We spend recklessly on windmills and welfare, unconcerned about ballooning national debt. It's time to stop kidding ourselves.

By ALEXANDER DOWNER



Final glimpse of cold-blooded killer as she is locked up for life

The death cap mushroom murderer was handed a non-parole period of 33 years, meaning she will not be eligible for release until the age of 81.

By JOHN FERGUSON, ELLIE DUDLEY

SPONSORED CONTENT

A Parisian pop-up in Sydney

This September, Sydney welcomes the Miss Dior Café—a two-day pop-up blending fragrance, flavo...

SPONSORED

The new rules of intimacy

The most interesting shift is happening in private. Three Australians found confidence and...

SPONSORED

Hide Comments ^

Add your comment to this story

Join the conversation, you are commenting as **redsearch** Logout

Comments

My Profile

Commenting Guidelines

Reader comments on this site are moderated before publication to promote spirited, safe and healthy debate. Thousands of comments are submitted daily and we do our best to publish as many as we can, but submitting one does not guarantee publication. Need help? See our FAQs or Commenting Guidelines.

By posting a comment you are accepting our Terms & Conditions.

B I 99

Post a comment

Post comment

COMMENTS0

Viewing Options ▾

Christina6 hours ago

Getting enough sun is vital to your health. The difference can be 10 years of life as the vitamin D and nitric oxide production is crucial to your overall and cardiac health. Just don't overdo it.

Like👍3Reply▾Report▾

John7 hours ago

Proof beyond any shadow of doubt the world, or at least this lot, has gone totally mad.

Like👍4Reply▾Report▾

geoff14 hours ago

I'm 70 years old and have spent my life in the sun every summer. Never get sunburnt but build a a tan gradually. Have my skin checked every year and have never had a skin cancer yet. Am I just lucky or am I as I think sun hardened?

Like👍1Reply▾Report▾

jane8 hours ago

@geoff Lucky!

Like👍13Reply▾Report▾

Sharyn4 hours ago

@geoff Possibly lucky to have a good skin. However sun exposure in our latter years tends to be very ageing.

Like👍3Reply▾Report▾

Rachel17 hours ago

Slip, Slop, Slap advert was brought in too late for those born in the 70's and earlier. And don't even get me started on the quality of our sunscreens compared to European countries that actually have better uv protection than we do. Sunscreen needs to be regulated .

Like👍5Reply▾Report▾

Andrew17 hours ago

Early morning sun is very healthy and vital. It sets your circadian rhythm and aids in a good night's sleep. Sun exposure to the face and hands is enough for Vit D production but sun screens and swimming reduce vitamin D. Life guards have low levels of Vit D according to research when compared to sunbathers. Sun at the hottest time of the day is the most dangerous. Also being repeatedly burnt.

Like👍2Reply▾Report▾

Abednego's Thermometer17 hours ago

Well yes.

But is there a link now with the fact that in some studies up to 70% of the population is said to be Vitamin D deficient?

Or is the normal range simply too high?

Like👍5Reply▾Report▾

Bruce17 hours ago

More nanny.

Like👍3Reply▾Report▾

Micko18 hours ago

Us boomers spent our whole teen years lying on beaches seeing how burnt we could get and long before we knew anything about sunblock cream. Now we are all getting skin cancer. Hope the youth of today can learn from our mistake.

Like👍13Reply▾Report▾

Ross18 hours ago

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness.

Like👍3Reply▾Report▾

still Bryan (pending)18 hours ago

As night follows day we will see rocketing cases of melanoma but one can't legislate against stupidity

Like👍8Reply▾Report▾

View More Comments

Like👍3Reply▾Report▾

still Bryan (pending)18 hours ago

As night follows day we will see rocketing cases of melanoma but one can't legislate against stupidity

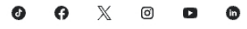
Like👍8Reply▾Report▾

View More Comments

Advertisement



THE AUSTRALIAN 



ABOUT US

MEMBERSHIP

CONTACT US

OUR NETWORK

Our Area