

SUN and HEAT WARNING ARTICAL

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The summer is here, and with it come potential problems with sun exposure, heat, and dehydration. Let's first discuss the effects from the sun.

A swift and painful result of excessive and unprotected exposure to the sun is widely known sunburn. However, there is often little concern about the far greater dangers associated with excessive or prolonged sun exposure damage to the skin, premature aging of the skin, and the development of skin cancers, including malignant melanoma, whose incidence is one of the most rapidly increasing cancers in adults. Even more disturbing is that cases of malignant melanoma among young people have doubled in the past 10 years. And if that is not enough, too much sun exposure can also have an adverse effect upon the eyes, sometimes leading to blindness.

If you, in the course of your duties, or if your family and you are participating in activities near the water or beach, the risks are increased because of the prolonged direct exposure and the reflection of the sun's rays from the water, the sand, or the reflective material on your personal flotation devices (PFDs). However, by knowing and appreciating the risks, you can minimize your exposure to the sun's rays and still safely participate in these activities.

First, stay in the shade whenever possible. Next, use clothing that is impervious to the sun's rays. Remember that clothes or hats of a loose knit or webbing may allow the sun's rays to get through to the skin or scalp.

For areas of the skin that cannot be covered, use an appropriate sunscreen. It effectively reduces the sun's effect upon the skin. (Remember that biminis, T-tops, canopies and umbrellas block direct sun but not the *reflected rays* of the sun.) The regular use of sunscreen over the years may reduce the chance of skin damage, some types of skin cancer, and other harmful effects caused by exposure to the sun. In buying a sunscreen, be sure it protects from UVA and UVB rays. The UVA rays may contribute to skin damage and premature skin aging. UVB rays cause sunburn. The product's sun protection factor (SPF) identifies the number of times that a person's natural sunburn protection is improved by the sunscreen. Use a sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher.

In most instances, the sunscreen should be applied before sun exposure, rubbed in thoroughly, and reapplied every two (2) hours or after bathing, swimming, or excessive perspiring. Basically, follow the directions that accompany the product.

There are a couple of special situations to remember. Lips also need protection. So apply a lip balm with similar SPF protection as for the skin. Also, when bare skin is exposed, as when short pants or bathing suits are worn, remember to apply the sunscreen to *all* bare areas.

Although not as highly publicized, another effect of even low levels of exposure to UVB rays is harm to the lens of the eye that may lead to the development of cataracts. However, relatively simple preventive measures are available. The best protection is wearing sunglasses with UV protection. The wearing of a cap or a hat with a wide brim decreases direct eye exposure to the sun's rays to a great degree.

Now, let's discuss heat and dehydration.

Dehydration can occur insidiously. When you realize you're thirsty, you are already behind in your drinking. It will be hard to catch up on your fluids that same day. So think ahead and stay hydrated.

First, to attain optimal hydration drink two or three glasses of fluid during the two hours *before* you actually start your patrol or other activity. Then maintain hydration by drinking four to eight ounces every half-hour or so. Do not drink caffeinated sodas. They promote dehydration. And, don't drink beer or other alcoholic beverages. Your best choice is cool water. Also, to maintain an adequate salt balance, eat regularly or snack on salt containing foods such as pretzels.

On particularly hot, sunny days, just as with sun exposure, seek shade whenever you can, and wear a cap or hat to lessen the effect of the sun's heat on your head.

Now *an important caution*: If you are *not* perspiring, and/or you are feeling hot or ill, you may not be adapting to the heat. Get into a shaded or cool wet area and fan your skin, and seek medical care immediately. You may be on the verge of always-dangerous heat stroke or heat exhaustion.

Remember the proverbial, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." By employing these simple control methods, you decrease your own and your family's risk of current and future health problems caused by repeated or prolonged sun exposure and the effects of heat and dehydration.