

10 Myths about sun protection

1. It is not possible to get sunburnt on cloudy or cool days.

False:

You can get sunburnt on mild days due to the high levels of UV radiation that can penetrate clouds. Check the SunSmart UV Alert every day and protect your skin when UV levels are 3 or above, even when you are in the sun for short periods. The SunSmart UV alert is available in the weather section of most daily newspapers or at www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv

2. If your cosmetics contain sunscreen, you do not need to use sunscreen.

False:

Foundations and moisturisers that contain sunscreen are fine if you are outside for short periods such as a quick trip to the shops at lunchtime. However, if you need to spend periods of time in the sun, use a separate sunscreen and reapply it every 2 hours – not just once in the morning. Be aware that most cosmetic products offer protection that is much lower than the maximum recommended SPF30+.

3. People with olive skin are not at risk of skin cancer.

False:

Regardless of skin type, if you spent your childhood in Australia you are at higher risk of developing skin cancer than someone who grew up elsewhere. People who tan easily or are naturally dark skinned have a lower risk than people with fair skin that burns easily, but they are still at risk of skin damage and skin cancer.

4. Solariums are a safe way to get a 'base tan' to start off the summer.

False:

Solariums emit UV radiation that is up to five times stronger than the midday sun, so they can damage your skin even more than a 'natural' suntan. Research shows that using a solarium can significantly increase your risk of melanoma. There is no safe way to tan.

5. People need plenty of sun exposure to avoid vitamin D deficiency.

False:

On days when UV levels are high, most people get enough Vitamin D through normal activity, even with sun protection. In summer, a few minutes of sun exposure outside peak UV periods provides adequate vitamin D. During winter, 2-3 hours of sun exposure spread throughout the week is sufficient for vitamin D in southern states. When UV levels are 3 or above, sun protection is still needed.

6. Fake tan darkens the skin, so that means your skin is protected from the sun.

False:

Fake tanning lotion does not improve your body's ability to protect itself from the sun, so you will still need sun protection.

7. You don't have to be concerned about skin cancer because if it happens you will see it, and it is easy to treat.

False:

Skin cancer treatment can be much more serious than having a lesion 'burnt off'. It can include surgery, chemotherapy and can result in permanent scarring. Skin cancer can also metastasise and spread to other parts of your body. Check your skin regularly and consult your GP immediately if you notice any changes. Prevention is always better than cure.

8. Only sunbathers get skin cancer.

False:

Most people get burnt when they are not deliberately seeking a tan. It often occurs when they least expect it such as when they are working in the garden, walking the dog or just having a picnic.

9. If you tan but don't burn, you don't need to bother with sun protection.

False:

If your skin turns brown, it is a sign of sun damage, even if there is no redness or peeling. Your skin turns brown as a way of just trying to protect itself because the UV rays are damaging living cells. If you tan easily, you are still at risk of skin cancer and need to use sun protection.

10. You can't get burnt in the car or through a window.

False:

Glass reduces but does not block transmission of UV radiation, so you can still get burnt in the car or through a window.