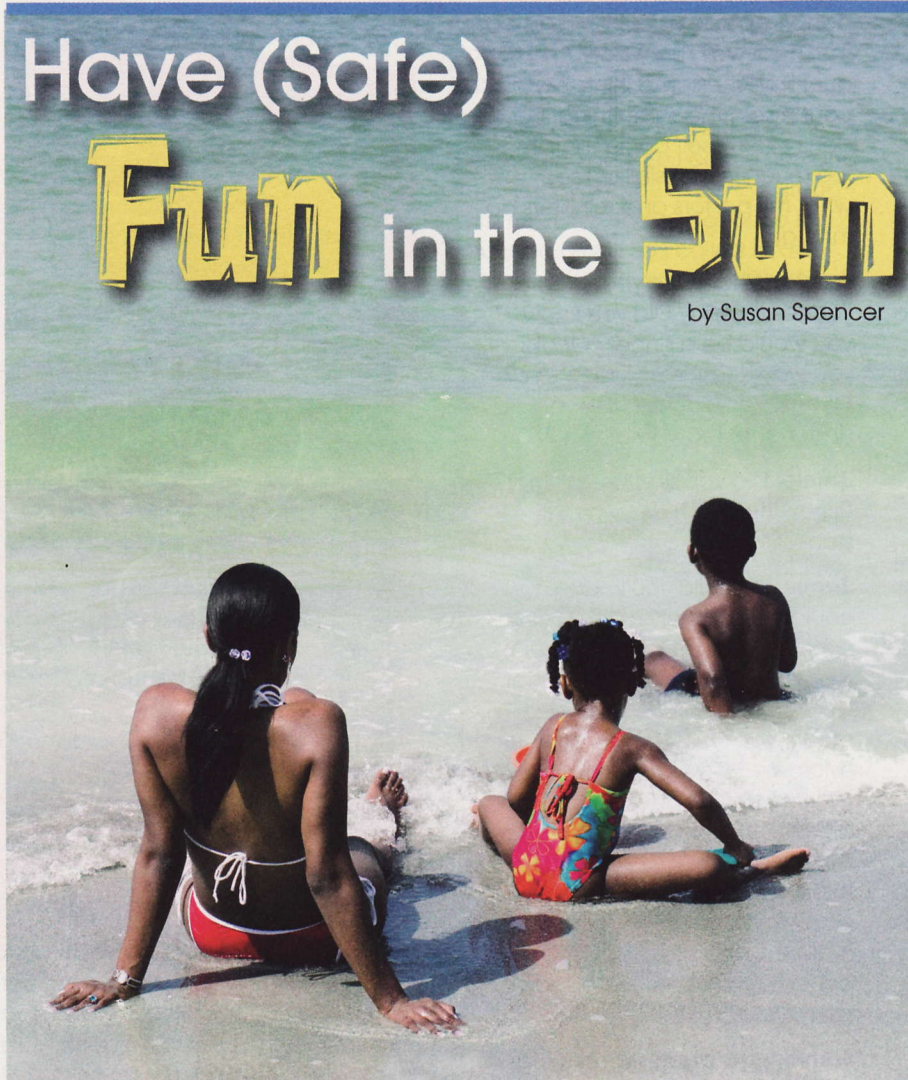


S2S Health

Have (Safe)

Fun in the Sun

by Susan Spencer



Summertime might be when the living is easy, but fun in the sun has health risks. Follow these basic precautions and care tips to get the most out of summer—safely.

"The summer months are lumps and bumps and insect bites. It really has to do with being outdoors more," said Dr. Brenda Geddis-Comrie, a family medicine physician at UMass Memorial Medical Center in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Fractures and sprains from bicycling, Rollerblading and skateboarding are all-too-common summer mishaps. Wearing a helmet and—for wheels underfoot—elbow, wrist and

knee guards can prevent serious injuries and keep you in the game.

According to Dr. Roneet Lev, an emergency medicine physician at Scripps Mercy Hospital in San Diego, there are 400 heat-related deaths each year in the United States. When the temperature rises, drink extra water or sports drinks to keep your cool. Seek prompt medical attention if you feel weak, disoriented and nauseous, have a headache or muscle aches or a dry mouth.

While the sun might feel good after the cooler months, its ultraviolet rays are dangerous. "Sunburn and skin cancer can occur in all hues of skin,"

said Dr. Charles Crutchfield III, a Minneapolis-area dermatologist. "In fact, the darkest hue of skin only provides an SPF of about 6 to 8." Harmful rays still get through without protection, especially at midday. Apply a sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher an hour before going out in the sun and then reapply every hour. Make sure the sunscreen protects against cancer-causing UVA as well as burn-causing UVB waves. Sun-protective clothing and sunglasses also keep you covered.

Ultraviolet light is reflected from sand and water and can pass through clouds, so burns can occur even if it's overcast, said dermatologist Dr. Clifford Perlis, from Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia. If you get a sunburn, apply cool compresses, refrigerated aloe vera gel or 1 percent hydrocortisone cream. Aspirin or indomethacin may help relieve pain.

Swimming is a great way to beat the heat, but Dr. Geddis-Comrie said that chemicals used to treat water in swimming pools actually reduce your body's defense against infection. Swimmer's ear, an infection of the outer ear canal, can be painful. Symptoms include redness, swelling and discharge or pus in the ear. See the doctor for anti-inflammatory ear solutions and antibiotic treatments.

Jellyfish stings are another beach hazard. These gelatinous sea creatures have long tentacles that release venom. Check with local officials to see if stings have been reported and avoid those areas or wear a wet suit. If you do get stung, remove the tentacles with a stick or pair of tweezers and rinse the area with salt water, vinegar or rubbing alcohol. A paste of unseasoned meat tenderizer may also cleanse the sting. Apply hydrocortisone cream and antibiotic ointment twice a day.

Going for a hike? Remember the adage about poison ivy: "Leaves of

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three: let them be.” The plant and its cousins, poison sumac and poison oak, contain an oil called urushiol, which can cause severe itching and blistering. “Poison ivy is only spread in the first few hours of contact,” said Dr. Crutchfield. Wear a poison ivy block, as well as long clothing and socks, for protection. Wash exposed skin, clothes and pets as soon after contact as possible. Use hydrocortisone cream if you develop a mild rash, but see a doctor if it’s severe.

Apply insect repellent with at least 30 percent DEET to ward off stinging and biting insects. Even mosquito bites can lead to skin infection from scratching. Clean the area with mild soap, then apply a soothing treatment like calamine lotion to relieve itching. Deer ticks, especially prevalent in the Midwest and Northeast, can spread Lyme disease. Check your body often for these poppy seed-size insects and pull them off with tweezers. See your doctor if you think you’ve been bitten by a deer tick, and bring in the tick for testing, if you can. If you get stung by a bee, remove the stinger with tweezers and clean the area—and keep an EpiPen handy if you’re allergic.

Don’t let spoiled food ruin your picnic. Dr. Lev suggests carrying meat and other perishable foods in a different cooler than beverages or snacks. Cook meat to a proper temperature. And avoid food that’s been left out for more than two hours.

A little forethought and prompt treatment of common ailments will keep your summer sizzling. **S**

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