



Keeping Residents Sun Safe This Summer

Enjoying the sun's warmth on a clear day can bring joy and comfort; but it is also a potential source of harm for older adults. Balancing the benefits and risks of sun exposure can enable residents to enjoy the sun while protecting their health.

A little sun can boost health and wellness

Moderate sun exposure has several benefits:

- ✓ **Promotes vitamin D production**

Vitamin D is key to bone health, calcium absorption, and immune function. This is essential for older adults because of their high risk for osteoporosis and fractures. At the same time, older adults generally need higher amounts of vitamin D as they don't get enough from sunlight exposure or their dietary intake.

- ✓ **Supports mood and mental wellbeing**

Sunlight not only boosts serotonin and dopamine, but it can help prevent seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

- ✓ **Encourages physical activity**

When it is sunny and people go outside, they are more likely to participate in activities such as walking or gardening. This physical activity contributes to heart health, strengthens muscles, and improves balance and flexibility. It may even help residents reduce their blood pressure and maintain a healthy weight.

- ✓ **Regulates circadian rhythms**

This contributes to good sleep hygiene, which benefits both mental and physical health.

Of course, there also are risks of sun exposure in older adults. [These include:](#)

- ✓ **Increased risk of sunburn and skin damage**

The skin thins with age and is less able to repair UV damage. As a result, older people are more prone to sunburn and skin damage such as tears or bruises.

- ✓ **Increased risk of skin cancer**

Skin cancer is more prevalent in people over age 65 than in younger populations.

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✓ **Contributes to photoaging**

Photoaging results in wrinkles, loss of skin elasticity, and changes in pigmentation.

✓ **Risk of eye damage**

UV exposure can cause damage to the eye and contribute to cataract development.

Medication reviews as a preventive measure

Both prescription and over-the-counter medications can increase sun sensitivity, or photosensitivity. These include:

- Antibiotics such as trimethoprim and ciprofloxacin
- Diabetes medications such as glipizide, glyburide, and glimepiride
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
- Pain relievers such as naproxen, diclofenac, and piroxicam
- Diuretics such as furosemide and thiazides
- Some antihistamines, such as promethazine
- Anti-arrhythmic drugs such as amiodarone and quinidine
- Acne medications such as tretinoin and isotretinoin
- Tricyclic antidepressants like amitriptyline and nortriptyline
- Methotrexate

"As we're getting into spring and summer, it's a good time to have the pharmacist review medication regimens with sun sensitivity in mind," suggested Demetra Antimisiaris, PharmD, co-editor of The Senior Care Pharmacist. As the weather gets warmer and people are enjoying holidays and vacations, it also is important to remind residents and their families about the safe sun exposure and how to protect themselves and their loved ones, she said.

It is worth noting that not every person will experience photosensitivity from any medication. However, it is important for every resident, regardless of what medications they take, to be protected against overexposure to the sun.

Sun safety measures: hats, sunscreen, umbrellas, and more

Several recommendations can help keep residents safe. These include:

- Limit exposure to direct sunlight to 10-30 minutes a few times each week. Avoid midday sun (between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.). Schedule outdoor activities and events earlier in the day or early evening.
- Encourage/advise use of protective clothing like long sleeves, slacks or pants, wide-brimmed hats, and sunglasses with 100% UVA/UVB protection.
- Have outdoor areas with umbrellas, trees, or cover such as awnings and tenting.



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- Encourage use of broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF of 30 or higher). This should be applied 15 minutes before going outside and reapplied every two hours.
- Use windows and window treatments that reduce dangerous sun exposure. Though not always possible or practical, these include tinted windows and window films, low-emissivity coated windows, laminated glass, electrochromic windows, and exterior/interior shading.

There have been some myths and misunderstandings about sunscreen. However, [studies consistently show](#) that sunscreen use reduces the risk of melanoma (skin cancer). Contrary to some concerns, sunscreen is not toxic and does not cause cancer; and using sunscreen does not cause vitamin D deficiency. The American Academy of Dermatology and the American Cancer Society recommend using a broad-spectrum, 30 SPF or higher sunscreen every day. Sunscreen is important for everyone, including older adults and people with darker skin tones. To reduce skin irritation, consider products that are easier to apply and that are unscented.

Like everyone else, residents deserve to enjoy the sun and fun of spring and summer. The care team, including pharmacists, can help them make the most of sunny days...safely.

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- Demetra Antimisariis,
PharmD, co-editor of *The Senior Care Pharmacist*

Sources

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- <https://med.stanford.edu/news/insights/2025/06/sunscreen-science.html>
- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/benefits-of-moderate-sun-exposure>



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