



# Sun Exposure



*After a burn injury, healing skin can become very sensitive to the sun. Aim to protect your skin from sunburn. Here are some possible effects of sun exposure on burns and grafts, as well as ways to prevent problematic exposure.*

## Early Sun Exposure

In the first one to two years of healing after a burn, scars are rapidly maturing and sun exposure can have major effects on them. Scars are much more sensitive to the sun than unburned skin.

**Hyper or Hypo Pigmentation** – Sun exposure can cause scars to heal either darker or lighter than non-wounded areas. These areas may stay discolored while unburned skin may return to your normal skin tone. This can lead to scarred areas, especially grafts, appearing splotchy or mismatched. Skin grafts may lose their ability to produce the natural oils healthy skin uses to hydrate itself, especially after a sunburn, and skin can dry out leading to cracking and pain. When at the beach, swimming, or enjoying water sports, bring extra sunscreen and re-apply often, especially to skin grafts and burn scars.

**Heat** – Be mindful of preventing overheating. Burns and grafts may not have sweat glands. Since sweat and evaporation are the main ways that the body cools itself, it is common to overheat after just moments in the sun (especially with burns over large surface areas).

**Medications** – Certain medications may increase sun sensitivity. Consult your prescription info pamphlet or ask your doctor if any of your medications might make you more prone to sunburn, including some of the following: antihistamines, antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, and some supplements. Check with your doctor to clarify.

## Prevention

**Avoidance** – Stay out of the sun for extended periods to avoid the negative effects of sunburn on your scars. In the first one to two years of healing, especially if you tend to be prone to sunburns, avoid the direct midday sun and plan outdoor activities either early or late in the day. When you do need to be in the sun, try to ensure there are shady areas to regularly retreat to, or bring an umbrella or a suitable hat.

**Sunscreen** – Daily sunscreen use, even on winter or overcast days, helps prevent accidental over-exposure. Use higher SPF sunscreen and apply it regularly. Keep in mind that every person's skin is different so some brands work better for some people than others—you may have to try a few. Some survivors recommend Neutrogena, EltaMD 46, Vanicream Sunscreen 50, and Aveeno Protect and Hydrate.

**Clothing** – You can use SPF-rated clothing (soft and breathable with UV-resistant fibers) to protect your skin from the sun along with hats and sunglasses. Darker colors are usually more effective at absorbing UV rays prior to them reaching your skin. Cooling scarves can protect from sun and help keep you from getting overheated. Standard clothing may be SPF 5-15, but clothes made for sun protection may be SPF 50+. You may see clothing use SPF or UPF to describe their UV resistance SPF and UPF are interchangeable.

**Hydration** – Staying hydrated helps manage body temperature and combats overheating. If you are overheating, move to a shaded place and have a cool drink. Survivors suggest carrying a large water bottle with ice that can be refilled throughout the day.

For any additional questions or support navigating any of the resources listed above, please contact AARBF:

**Phone: 800-242-BURN \* Website: AARBF.org \* Email: Info@aarbf.org**