

Fun in the Sun: Safety Tips From the Healthy Children Project

Lauren 00:06

Welcome to the LDA podcast, a series by The Learning Disabilities Association of America. Our podcast is dedicated to exploring topics of interest to educators, individuals with learning disabilities, parents and professionals to work towards our goal of creating a more equitable world. This episode is presented by the Healthy Children Project. LDA's Healthy Children Project works to reduce exposures to chemicals that can harm brain health and contribute to learning, attention, and developmental disabilities. This year, we celebrate Healthy Children Project's 20th Anniversary. As we celebrate this milestone, we will be presenting a series of podcast episodes highlighting the work of HCP and helping you all to have a safer and healthier summer and fall.

Amy Barto 00:49

Hi, everyone.

Tracy Gregoire 00:50

I'm Tracy Gregoire, director of the Healthy Children Project and I live in Maine. With me today is Amy Barto.

Amy Barto 00:58

Hi, I'm Amy Barto and I'm from the land of the Great Lakes and outdoor fun year round. So today we're talking about sun safety, something we all need to think about no matter where we live or play. So who doesn't want to be in the sun, right? Sun provides vitamin D and is a boost to mood, which are both very big things. But we also need to be careful. So Tracy, let's start with the basics. What do we need to do to be safe in the sun?

Tracy Gregoire 01:22

The big idea of sun safety is that we need to think about ultraviolet radiation. UV radiation is a form of electromagnetic radiation that comes from the sun. These rays are invisible but can harm your skin and play a part in causing skin cancer. They can also put you at greater risk for cataracts. One defense against UV radiation that most people are familiar with is sunscreen. The thing we might not realize is that sunscreen alone is not enough. In fact, the best defenses against getting too much harmful UV radiation are timing, taking advantage of shade, and wearing protective clothing.

Amy Barto 02:02

Okay, so first let's cover when to be in the sun. So be sure to plan your time in the sun. UV rays are at their strongest between 10am and 2pm. So when possible, go outdoors in the early morning or late afternoon when the sun is lower in the sky. And then UV radiation peaks about midday. So if you are out at that time, find shade or be sure to make your own. You can find a tree to eat under or set up a sun shelter like a tent or an umbrella. And it is extra important to keep infants in the shade because they lack the tanning pigments known as melanin which protect their skin.

Tracy Gregoire 02:39

When you know you're going to be in the sun, be sure to wear protective clothing like wide brimmed hats, shirts, shorts and bathing suit cover ups also provide the best UV ray protection and allow you to use less sunscreen. Also, don't forget the sunglasses. Good shades protect your eyes from UV radiation and decrease your risk of early cataracts and retina damage. In fact, children are more at risk for retina damage from UV rays. So wearing hats and sunglasses is even more important for children when they are out in the sun.

Amy Barto 03:14

Back to that sunscreen, you know that vital summer resource that we make sure to lather on our skin. But when we think about sunscreen, we need to think about toxins, right? When we use a sunscreen, we need to remember that those chemicals can enter our bodies through our skin. And so what do we need to watch for, and why?

Tracy Gregoire 03:32

Wow, okay, so what do you use for it? Well, there are just two ingredients we know enough about to consider safe: zinc oxide and titanium oxide. And if you are not a scientist like I am not, don't fear, you can remember zinc oxide and titanium oxide. Don't fall for the high SPF labels. Anything higher than SPF 50 can tempt you to stay in the sun too long. So even if you don't burn, your skin may be damaged. Stick to those SPF between 15 and 50 and pick a product based on your own skin coloration, how long you're going to be outside, how much shade you will be near, or how much cloud cover there is, and then reapply often. Don't use the sunscreen with included insect repellent. If you need bug repellent, buy it separately and then apply it first.

Tracy Gregoire 03:32

Some sunscreens can leave you overexposed to damaging UV rays. Some may break down in the sun, other sunscreens may contain compounds that can impact your health. When looking for sunscreen some big ones to avoid are oxybenzone and vitamin A. Oxy Benzene is a synthetic estrogen, which can penetrate the skin and disrupt your hormone system. You should also avoid sunscreens with vitamin A. Eating vitamin A laden vegetables is good for you, but spreading vitamin A on your skin may not be. Data shows that tumors and lesions develop sooner on skin coated with creams laced with vitamin A, also called retinol palmitate or retinol. Avoid any skin or lip product whose label includes retinol palmitate retinol or vitamin A.

Tracy Gregoire 05:14

So it's important to avoid sprays when possible. Sunscreen sprays cloud the air with tiny particles that get into your lungs and may not be safe to breathe. Reapplying cream often, we can't stress this enough. Sunscreen chemicals sometimes degrade in the sun. Sunscreens wash off, rub off on towels and clothing. You need to reapply and reapply often. Also try to avoid sunscreens with the word fragrance. The word fragrance is often used to hide any number of synthetic chemicals including phthalates, which can harm children's brain health. Need help picking good sunscreen? We recommend checking out Environmental Working Group's sunscreen database. They rate the safety and efficacy of SPF rated products including hundreds of sunscreens and SPF moisturizers, as well as

lip products. They give high ratings to brands that provide broad spectrum long-lasting protection with ingredients that pose fewer health concerns when absorbed by your body.

Amy Barto 06:17

Okay, so we need to be sure to think about when we are in the sun what we're doing for exposed skin, and be sure to wear sunglasses. What are some other things people need to know about their time in the sun? So you know, for example, what are some of the myths out there that we need to bust? Here's a few. Vitamin D only comes from the sun. (wrong buzzer noise).

Tracy Gregoire 06:37

And many people don't get enough vitamin D, a hormone manufactured by the skin in the presence of sunlight. Your doctor can test your level though and recommend supplements if you are low in this vital nutrient.

Amy Barto 06:50

And men don't need to worry about skin care as women do. (wrong buzzer noise).

Tracy Gregoire 06:56

In 2012 twice as many American men died from melanoma as women did.

Amy Barto 07:02

And the one that haunted me as a teenager, you only need sunscreen on sunny days. No.

Tracy Gregoire 07:09

Even on cloudy days 80% of the sun's UVA rays may pass through clouds and burn your skin.

Amy Barto 07:16

Yeah, we are in the land of four season sports. So here's a big one. You only need to worry about protecting your skin in the summer. No.

Tracy Gregoire 07:26

The sun is the sun all year round. In fact, snow reflects the sun like water does. So anytime you're in the sun, you need to think about how you're protecting your skin and your eyes.

Amy Barto 07:37

And a big one all over: that people with dark skin do not need to wear sunscreen.

Tracy Gregoire 07:42

This is a serious one. Everyone needs to protect their skin. People of color have lower risk of developing skin cancer but it is often diagnosed at a later stage, making it harder to treat. It is often found in areas of skin not typically exposed to the sun like under the finger and toenails and on the bottom of the feet. In fact, the bottom of the feet is where 30 to 40% of melanomas are found and people of color. Bob Marley, the famous reggae musician, died at 36 of skin cancer. A malignant melanoma was found under the skin of his toe and the cancer spread throughout his body. One

important thing to remember is that early detection is key. The Healthy Children Project has a great video by the American Academy of Dermatology Association on people of color and skin cancer. We posted the video on our healthychildrenproject.org/sunsafety webpage.

Amy Barto 08:40

Oh thank you. So planning your time in the sun and protecting your skin are two of the big ideas for having a safe and healthy summer. Remember to look for zinc oxide or titanium oxide in your sunscreens. And for those four seasons outdoor folks utilize sunscreen year round. Check your skin regularly for new moles that are irregular in shape, color, or are growing. And if you're concerned, ask your primary care physician about seeing a dermatologist.

Tracy Gregoire 09:09

The Healthy Children Project advocates for safer products and healthier food, water, and air that are free of chemicals that harm children's brain health. If you found this information today helpful on safety in the sun, please share and don't forget to check out our website at healthychildrenproject.org for more resources and updates on what we are doing to protect your family's health.

Lauren 09:37

Thank you for listening to the LDA podcast. To learn more about LDA and to get valuable resources and support, visit lda-america.org