

Burned to a crisp:

if you play golf, there's a good chance you'll get skin cancer

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What is sunburn, and does it lead to skin cancer?

The burn is a result of ultraviolet rays damaging the skin's DNA. If you've had five or more sunburns in your life, you've doubled your chances of getting melanoma.

What's the best way to treat sunburn?

Drink water to replace fluids, take some acetaminophen (Tylenol), and soothe the skin in cool water or, even better, milk, which creates a protein film that helps ease the discomfort, says the Skin Cancer Foundation. "When your skin begins to peel--a natural part of the healing process--use a non-greasy moisturizer to reduce itching," Dr. Robins says. Adds Dr. Andrew Jaffe, a dermatologist in southwest Florida: "A topical steroid can be prescribed by a doctor for a really bad burn."

What about hair and lips?

Lips are a prime breeding ground for skin cancer, says Dr. Jaffe, because golfers forget to apply a lip balm with SPF protection. "It's skin, too," he says. If you forgot a hat, shame on you. But you can spray an alcohol-based sunscreen into the scalp to keep from scorching the top of your head. It's perfectly safe for hair. And don't forget the skin behind the ears. Dr. Jaffe says those areas get pummeled by the sun.

What should I be looking for in hats and clothes?

Nearly all golf-clothing manufacturers offer merchandise that has UPF protection. "In the early years, I wasn't aware that normal clothing didn't protect me from the sun," says Greg Norman, whose apparel company offers sunscreen materials in its clothes. "I distinctly remember playing the Australian Skins in the '80s in North Queensland and suffering intense sunburn through my shirt."

I'm on medication, and the label says to avoid the sun. Is it still OK to play golf?

Generally, it's still OK to play, says Dr. Brod, but you should consult with the prescribing in the sun while taking these medications, be sure to wear protective clothing.

What should I do to protect my skin when I'm not playing golf? After the round? Rainy days? Retinoid creams (Avage, Renova) can reverse some sun damage when applied regularly, says Dr. Brod. "Topical antioxidants also might reverse some of the damage. I also recommend applying sunscreen no matter what you're doing. Driving in the car, for example, is a prime way of getting too much sun exposure."

WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

(1) **NORMAL MOLE** ...A mole is a small brown spot or growth that appears in the first few decades of life. It can be flat or raised and generally is round.

(2) **ACTINIC KERATOSIS** ...The most common precancer, it's a small, crusty, bump. Colors vary. It can itch and bleed and can turn into squamouscell carcinoma.

(3) **DYSPLASTIC NEVI** These noncancerous moles resemble melanoma in color variation within the blemish and sometimes in their unusual shapes and border irregularities.

(4) **BASAL CELL** ...This is the most common skin cancer. This nonlethal blemish can be a shiny bump, a pink growth, a scar-like area or an open sore that doesn't heal easily.