Heaven's Gift of Sunshine

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No one wants skin cancer, and no one wants wrinkled aged skin! So—'stay out of the sun', we are told. We try. We cover up; we put on plenty of sunscreen, or we just stay indoors.

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But how can anything as wonderful as sunlight be so harmful to our health?

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Like almost everything in life, too much of a good thing can be a bad thing. But in proper amounts, sunlight is a great blessing. Besides warming our earth, and making things grow…

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…sunlight is an efficient germ killer.

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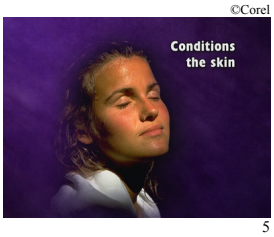

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Proper amounts of sunshine also give the skin a healthy glow and help make it smooth and pliable. In addition, a moderately tanned skin is more resistant to infections and sunburns than untanned skin.

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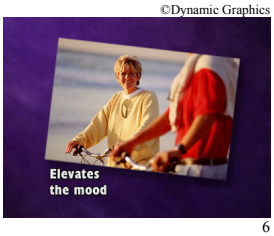

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Sunlight lifts the spirits of most people, producing a cheerful sense of well-being. Combined with active exercise, sunshine is an important aid in treating acute and chronic depression. In fact, seasonal variations in light levels can have a profound effect on one's mental health.

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These effects may be clearly seen in people suffering from seasonal affective disorder. This is a depressive illness associated with the small amounts of sunlight in fall and winter. Sunlight is a simple yet very successful treatment for this condition. So during winter's cold and gloomy months, try to catch any possible extra rays of sunshine.

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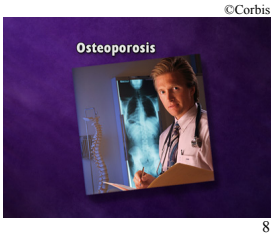

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Sunshine also plays a crucial role in helping to prevent osteoporosis. The body is able to manufacture vitamin D by the action of sunlight on the skin. This vitamin D enables the body to utilize the calcium essential for building healthy bones.

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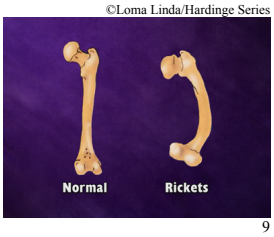

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A deficiency of vitamin D leads to rickets, a disorder where children's bones become soft and weak.

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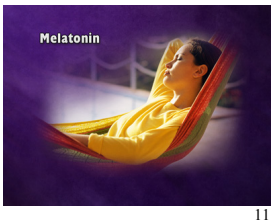
Did you know that daily sunlight also helps promote better sleep?



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In recent years, melatonin, a natural body hormone, has been found to enhance sleep.

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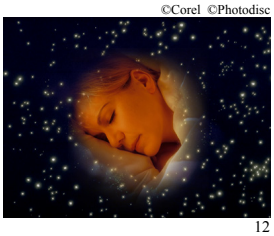

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The body carefully regulates melatonin production. The process is largely controlled by the light-dark cycle. Optimal melatonin production occurs at night, in a dark environment, especially after a bright sunny day.

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Melatonin is not stored in the body. We need a liberal supply each evening to sleep well. Studies demonstrate that daily exposure to natural sunlight will boost melatonin output. Artificial light is a weak substitute, as are manufactured melatonin supplements.

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Melatonin levels reach a peak in children, and fall slowly and steadily throughout adult life. This may explain why children sleep so much better than older people.

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In addition to what we've already mentioned, sunlight

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Strengthens the immune system,

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Alleviates pain from swollen arthritic joints, and

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may Lower elevated blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

An extra hour of sunlight every day, besides lifting your spirits, may also positively affect your energy, sleep, and even PMS (premenstrual syndrome).

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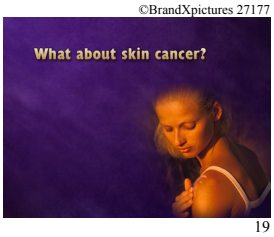

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But what about skin cancer?

It's true; **overexposure** to sunlight does increase skin cancer risk, especially in light-skinned people. About 95 percent of skin cancers are of two types:

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Squamous cell cancer, and

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Basal cell cancer.

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The chances of developing these types of cancer are increased when the skin is exposed to liberal doses of sunshine over many years. Fortunately, however, both of these cancers are slow growing and usually remain confined to the skin. There are very few fatalities, and these are mostly in people who neglect to have the cancers promptly removed.

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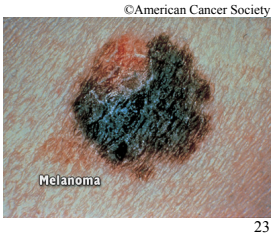

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Melanoma is a third type of skin cancer, which is very different from the others. It usually begins with a darkly pigmented mole, and has a fearsome tendency to spread and kill the victim. The rates of Melanoma cancer are rapidly rising around the world.

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The important risk factor with melanoma is sunburn, not so much the total amount of sunlight people are exposed to. Burning the skin is extremely harmful. Every burn destroys healthy, living tissue. Repeated burns cause irreversible damage and can cause skin cancer.

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And if all that isn't bad enough, repeated sunburn and even repeated deep tanning of the skin gradually destroys its elasticity and its oil glands, producing wrinkling and premature aging. Therefore, overdoses of sunlight should be carefully avoided.

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Dietary choices can also affect our chances of getting skin cancer. A high-fat diet, so common in today's society, significantly increases a person's risk.[1] [2]

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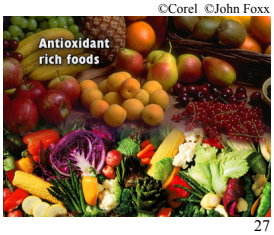

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On the other hand, a diet with plenty of antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables can help protect us from many types of cancers. Diets high in vitamins C and E have been shown to offer significant protection against skin cancer in particular.[3]

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The best way to obtain healthy amounts of these antioxidant vitamins is to eat the foods that contain them. Vitamin C is found in abundance in fresh vegetables and fruit, such as red and green bell peppers, green leafy vegetables, strawberries, blueberries and all citrus fruits. Some good sources of Vitamin E include almonds and sunflower seeds, green soybeans, sunflower oil, canola oil, olive oil, and even cooked spinach.[4]

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It's important to emphasize that most of the studies showing the cancer-protective effects of antioxidants have involved people who were getting their vitamins from natural foods,

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not vitamins from a bottle. Some of the research indicates that vitamin supplements do not provide the same protection that the natural food sources of these vitamins give.

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Speaking of cancer, did you know that sunshine could actually help to prevent it? People who get adequate sunshine are less likely to develop breast, colon or prostate cancer.[5] Researchers have also observed that the vitamin D and related compounds formed as a result of exposure to sunlight appear to suppress the growth of cancers already present. This includes certain types of leukemia and lymphoma, as well as breast and colon cancers.[6]

What can you do to **maximize** sunlight's benefits, while **avoiding** the harmful effects of getting too much?

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Here are some suggestions for safe, healthy exposure to sunlight:

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Modest tanning is protective; it's like putting sunglasses on your skin. But each person must understand his or her tolerance to sunlight. Fair-skinned people may need to begin with only five minutes of exposure to the sun per day. Darker-skinned people can begin with 10 to 15 minutes per day, with up to 30 minutes of sunbathing as a realistic goal for most people.

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Remember; never burn! Sunburns raise the risk of skin cancer. Wear protective clothing, eyewear, and a protective sunscreen if needed. Be especially careful around snow or water and on cloudy days because of the reflected rays and the ultra violet rays that penetrate through clouds.

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If you have an outdoor trip or vacation coming up, prepare your skin by giving it progressive exposure to sunlight in the days beforehand.

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Get a few minutes of sunshine on your face and hands each day. This will produce all the vitamin D you need for a healthy body and strong bones.

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Just remember that artificial light is a very poor substitute for the real thing. Spend a little time each day soaking up some daylight.

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Open your house to the sunshine each morning. It will improve your health and lift your spirits.

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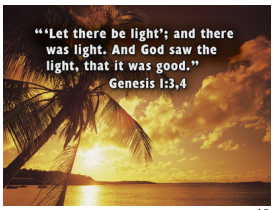
For thousands of years sunlight has been known as a mediator of life. Today we know that a **wise** use of sunlight can be extremely beneficial. It can be either healing or destructive; it can be the kiss of life or the kiss of death, depending on how we choose to use it.



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In the beginning, when God created the world, He said, "'Let there be light;' and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good." Genesis 1:3,4 NKJV

May God bless you as you seek to make a wise use of sunlight—one of heaven's nicest gifts.

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[1] U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. Cancer. In: The Surgeon General's Report on Nutrition and Health. Public Health Service DHHS (PHS) Publication Number 88-50210, 1988 p. 194. (Source: Proof Positive)

[2] Black HS, Lenger WA, et al. Influence of dietary lipid upon ultraviolet-light carcinogenesis. Nutr Cancer 1983;5(2):59-68.
Baumann CA, Rusch HP Effect of diet on tumors induced by ultraviolet light. Am J Cancer 1939;35:213-221. Cited in: Black HS , Herd JA , et al. Effect of a low-fat diet on the incidence of actinic keratosis. N Engl J Med 1994 May 5;330(18):1272-1275. (Source: Proof Positive)

[3] Black HS. Effects of dietary antioxidants on actinic tumor induction. Res Commun Chem Pathol Pharmacol 1974 Apr;7(4):783-786. (Source: Proof Positive, pg. 37)

[4] Nedley, MD, Neil, Proof Positive, Nedley Publications, 1998, p. 38.

[5] Studzinski GP, Moore DC. Sunlight—can it prevent as well as cause cancer? Cancer Res 1995 Sep 15;55(18):4014-4022. (Source: Proof Positive)

[6] Ainsleigh HG. Beneficial effects of sun exposure on cancer mortality. Prev Med 1993 Jan;22(1):132-40. (Source: Proof Positive, p. 498)