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Are Some People More Likely to Get Skin Damage from the Sun?

Everyone's skin and eyes can be affected by the sun and other forms of [ultraviolet \(UV\) rays](#)¹. People with light skin are much more likely to have their skin damaged by UV rays (and to get skin cancer), but darker-skinned people, including people of any ethnicity, can also be affected.

For some people, the skin tans when it absorbs UV rays. The tan is caused by an increase in the activity and number of melanocytes, which are the cells that make a brown pigment called **melanin**. Melanin helps block out damaging UV rays up to a point, which is why people with naturally darker skin are less likely to get sunburned, while people with lighter skin are more likely to burn. Sunburns can increase your risk of skin cancer, including melanoma. But UV exposure can raise skin cancer risk even without causing sunburn.

Aside from skin tone, other factors can also affect your risk of damage from UV light. You need to be especially careful in the sun if you:

- Have had skin cancer before
- Have a family history of skin cancer, especially melanoma
- Have many moles, irregular moles, or large moles
- Have freckles and burn before tanning
- Have fair skin, blue or green eyes, or blond, red, or light brown hair
- Live or vacation at high altitudes (UV rays are stronger the higher up you are)
- Live or vacation in tropical or subtropical climates
- Work indoors all week and then get intense sun exposure on weekends
- Spend a lot of time outdoors
- Have certain autoimmune diseases, such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE,

- or lupus)
- Have certain inherited conditions that increase your risk of skin cancer, such as xeroderma pigmentosum (XP) or nevoid basal cell carcinoma syndrome (Gorlin syndrome).
 - Have a medical condition that weakens your immune system, such as infection with [HIV²](#) (the virus that causes AIDS)
 - Have had an organ transplant
 - Take medicines that lower or suppress your immune system
 - Take medicines that make your skin more sensitive to sunlight

Ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you are taking any medicines that could increase your sensitivity to sunlight.

No matter how sensitive your skin is to the sun, it's important to know [how to protect yourself from UV rays³](#).

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/radiation-exposure/uv-radiation.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/infectious-agents/hiv-infection-aids.html
3. www.cancer.org/healthy/be-safe-in-sun/uv-protection.html

References

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Written by

The American Cancer Society medical and editorial content team
(www.cancer.org/cancer/acs-medical-content-and-news-staff.html)

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