

## FUN IN THE SUN

*Contributed by Heidi Roth, RDN, CHHC*

We've waited all year for it... Summer is finally here and in full swing! It's time to embrace outdoor living and having fun in the sun. From boosting our mood to enhancing our overall health, spending time outdoors can have a lot of benefits for both our mind and body. Of course, we want to do so in a safe way. Let's explore some of the benefits of getting outside, the importance of sun safety, and tips for staying healthy and hydrated during the summertime.

### Benefits of Getting Outside and in the Sun

If you have a pet, you've probably noticed that they LOVE to bask in the sun whether it's outside or in the little point indoors where the sun streams in through the window. This is because they instinctively know that sunlight is more than just a source of warmth – it is good for them. While we as humans need to be a little more careful of getting too much sun, appropriate amounts of sunlight are good for us as well – and any time spent outdoors is great for us!

What are some benefits of getting outside according to the latest studies?

- Sunlight, especially early morning sun, can help set our circadian rhythm – which means we will sleep better at night!
- Exposure to outdoor light helps us to make vitamin D, a vitamin essential for building bones and muscle, as well as decreasing inflammation.
- Better immune function
- Faster healing
- Improved moods

### Sun Safety = Sunscreen + Smart Accessories

While a little bit of sun can have a lot of health benefits, it's essential to protect our skin from the sun's harmful UV rays. This means finding (or making your own) shade during the peak hours of sun from 10 am to 4 pm, applying sunscreen generously to all exposed skin as well as wearing protective hats, clothing, and sunglasses to minimize sun exposure. Keep in mind reflective surfaces like water and snow can increase UV exposure as well.

### Understanding the UV Index

You may have noticed the UV index in weather forecasts. This is a standardized measure of the strength of the sun's UV rays to help people better protect themselves from them. A UV index of 1-2 is considered mild, 3-7 is considered moderate to high, and a UV index over 8 is considered very high or extreme. The EPA recommends sun protection if you venture outside when the UV index is 3 or higher. When in doubt, use the "Shadow Rule." If you are outside and your shadow is shorter than you, it's a good idea to seek shade and protect your skin and eyes.

### How to Pick a Good Sunscreen

There are so many options when it comes to picking a sunscreen- it can get overwhelming! Here are some key things to look for in a sunscreen.

- "Broad-spectrum" which means that you will be protected from both UVA and UVB rays. All sunscreens will prevent UVB rays which can cause sunburn and skin aging, but not all will protect from UVA rays, which are stronger and can cause skin cancer and melanomas. Broad-spectrum sunscreens will protect from both UVB and UVA rays.
- SPF (Sun Protection Factor) - don't bother going above SPF 50 as it doesn't provide any more protection and may give a false sense of security. Also keep in mind that SPF only measures effectiveness against UVB rays, not the more harmful UVA rays. Reapply the sunscreen often, regardless of SPF.
- Water-resistant formula, especially if you will be swimming or sweating excessively.
- Mineral-based ingredients, such as zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. These physically block the sun's rays (vs chemically) and are less likely to be absorbed into the bloodstream.





Avoid:

- Spray Sunscreens (due to inhalation risks)
- Oxybenzone, avobenzone, or other endocrine-disrupting chemicals
- Retinyl palmitate, retinol, or vitamin A
- Super-high SPFs
- Expired products

For more sunscreen recommendations visit: [EWG.org](http://EWG.org) for their sunscreen database.

## Stay Hydrated with Fruits & Veggies

Hydration is key to staying healthy and energetic during outdoor activities, especially when it is hot outside. Of course, drinking water is the best source of hydration. However, if you are sweating or exercising for longer than an hour, you may want to consider hydrating with some electrolytes as well (just be careful of added sugar content). Certain foods can also contribute to keeping you hydrated. Fruits and vegetables with a high water content, such as cucumbers, watermelon, red peppers, and celery are excellent choices for providing extra water as well as electrolytes.

Whether it's a day at the beach, a hike through the woods, or a family bike ride, keep in mind some sun safety and hydration tips and enjoy summer to the fullest. Wishing you a safe summer filled with memories, sun, and fun!

## Sun Safety Pop Quiz!

1. What time of day are the sun's UV rays the strongest?  
a) Early morning b) Late afternoon c) Midday d) Evening
2. Sunlight helps us create \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) Vitamin A b) Magnesium c) Vitamin D d) Sodium
3. How often should you reapply sunscreen when spending time outdoors?  
a) Every 30 minutes b) Every 5 hours c) Once a day d) Every 2 hours
4. True or false: Getting outside in the sunlight can improve our sleep.  
a) True b) False

**ANSWERS: 1'C 5'C 3'D 4'V**

## RECIPE CORNER: WATERMELON AGUA FRESCA

### INGREDIENTS:

- 6 cups cubed ripe seedless watermelon
- 2 cups cold water
- 1 cup cubed ice
- Mint sprig and/or lime wedges (optional)

### PREPARATION:

Add watermelon and water to a blender. Blend until smooth, about 1 minute. No need to strain unless you prefer little to no pulp (if so, use a fine mesh sieve to strain it).

Place in pitcher, add the ice, and stir. Garnish with mint and lime slices if you have them. Enjoy! Will keep for about 3 days in the refrigerator.



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