

Mail Today

THAT SUNSHINE

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IT'S THAT time of the year again — we must pack away our woolies with the mothballs and shake out the spaghettis and the sleeveless tops. However, we must be mindful of our health in this season especially and it is a prudent decision to take the necessary precautions to enjoy a safe and enjoyable summer.

Protecting the skin is crucial

The unforgiving sun in summer poses a threat to skin and precautions must be taken to ensure protection. Photodermatitis, literally translated as allergy to sunlight, and sunburn are the two major concerns that trouble people in summer. "10 per cent of the population is allergic to direct exposure of sunlight and suffer from an itchy rash, redness and boils," says Dr Hema Pant, dermatologist, Kaya Skin Clinic. Prickly heat also bothers some people. "This condition is caused due to sweating, excess humidity and the resultant bacterial infestation, which manifests in severe itching, rash and tiny boils in the affected region," says Dr Pant. She advises the application of ointment and soothing aloe vera if this happens. It's important to cover exposed areas of the skin with cloth gloves, mask, cap and similar protective measures against the sun to avoid this reaction. She adds that sunburn is caused by the ultra-violet radiation in sunlight which burns through the outer layer of skin and causes serious damage which shows up as patches of darkened skin peeling away. There is no other prevention for this other than staying well away from the sun especially in the afternoons when the sun's rays are focused directly on the earth. Sunscreen is a must and the higher the SPF the better.

To make a soothing balm for sunburnt skin at home, mix together the juice of six peeled cucumbers, two cups powdered milk and two teaspoons dried lavender flowers. Apply the above paste directly on the affected areas of the skin. Also, one cup of this mixture added to lukewarm water can be used as a skin smoothening balm.

Keep the bugs at bay

Bacteria thrive and multiply manifold in summer, be it on skin or on foodstuff. People enjoy their fruit *chaat* and drink roadside fruit juice, believing they are doing the healthy thing. But the reality is that they are merely making way for food poisoning, jaundice and typhoid.

Also, this is the season to be careful of malaria and mosquitoes. Make sure your house doesn't have any still water lurking in the corners — flush those toilets religiously, change the water in the potted plants and the vases, and pay special attention to the cooler while you are at it. Mosquito repellents are also a useful investment. "Ointment repellents contain chemicals which repel mosquitoes and insects and numerous studies have pro-

claimed them safe to be used, even for children," says Dr Monica Mahajan, senior consultant internal medicine, Max Hospital. She adds that those allergic to the ointments can opt for mosquito coils and lights but cautions that asthmatics could face a problem with them.

Listen to your body

Paying attention to the signs your body gives you is also important. "One should see a doctor if headache, fever and vomiting persists for over a day, especially as the incubation period for these diseases are

very short, sometimes just a few hours," says Dr Sanjeev Bagai, HOD pediatrics, Rockland Hospital. Meningococcal disease is also a grave health problem in summer time. Also referred to as cerebro-spinal meningitis, it's a bacterial disease spread by the meningococcal bacteria which attacks the outer cover of the brain.

Since it is spread through droplet infection — that is through sneezing, coughing or even talking — it is a highly contagious condition which required immediate medical attention. "Since bacteria thrives in this climate this disease is more prominent at this

time of the year. Prevention includes strict hygiene, staying away from overcrowded places and vaccination. There is a vaccine available for children when they are 2 years and above, which is efficacious for 3 years and covers all four strains of the bacteria," says Dr Bagai. If one has not been vaccinated and is exposed to a person suffering from this disease then a preventive dose of an oral antibiotic like ciprofloxacin is prescribed by the doctor.

Remember that bugs are attracted to heavily scented hair sprays, shampoos, lotions and perfumes, so limit your use of scented products during the

summer months. Use insect repellent when needed, applying only to exposed skin and washing thoroughly when back indoors.

Stay well hydrated

Dehydration occurs when the body loses too much fluid and can occur at any age, but it is most dangerous for babies, small children, and older adults. "Sweating, strenuous exercise or not drinking water can cause dehydration. Body muscles can begin to get tired and a person may experience leg cramps or feel faint," says Dr Byothra,



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SEASON

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We need to protect ourselves from summer health problems that range from sunstroke and dehydration to infections spread by mosquitoes and bugs

internal medicine, Sir Gangaram Hospital. Seniors are more prone to dehydration. "The elderly should avoid extreme heat and humidity. They might be taking medication which is diuretic in nature thus enabling further fluid loss. Also, at that age, the body's natural mechanisms for maintaining normal body temperature slow down," says Dr RM Chatterjee, general physician, Rockland Hospital. Medication including laxatives, antihistamines, amphetamines, and anti-depressants increase heat production by the body or affect the body's ability to regulate its tempera-

ture and if one is taking them then they should be wary about going into the sun for prolonged periods of time because of inadequate fluid balance in the body. Stock up on Electral and nimboo pani to keep replenishing your body with the salts lost through sweat. Heat stroke and heat exhaustion are also something one has to contend with in summer. While heatstroke strikes suddenly, heat exhaustion is a milder cousin which develops after several days. Those who spend hours in the sun and also the few who suffer from anhydrosis — an extreme condition in which a person

has few or no sweat glands at all — are prone to heat strokes. Losing excessive amounts of sweat can quickly dehydrate you, leading to circulatory problems, kidney failure and heat stroke.

Body should stay cool

Perspiration is the body's way of ridding itself of toxins and also regulating its temperature. "Sweating is the body's most effective way of cooling itself. When exposed to heat, the temperature rises, causing the glands to produce sweat, which evaporates from the skin, thereby reducing the body heat," says Dr Chatterjee. The problem arises when a person sweats too much. Excessive sweating or hyperhidrosis, is the secretion of sweat in amounts greater than needed to cool the body. It is a genetic condition which can also be caused by certain disease like obesity diabetes and gout. Menopause too can give rise to this problem. It is characterised by frequent, noticeable, excessive sweating on the feet, underarms, head or face which soak through clothes. Those suffering from this problem have the option of laser hair removal from areas like the armpits which can drastically reduce the smell or botox to blast away the sweat glands.

Temporary solutions

Talcs, deos and anti-perspirants do offer respite from sweating but are only temporary methods to control sweat. "Anti-perspirants help control sweat by forming gel plugs and blocking some of the sweat glands. Talcum powder works in the same way by blocking the pores on the skin. Deodorants on the other hand are alcohol-based and have an astringent-like cooling affect which evaporates sweat from the skin. They also contain antimicrobials which help eliminate bacteria on the skin's surface," says Dr Pant.

She adds that how much you sweat and even the way your sweat smells can be influenced by your mood, your diet, some drugs and medical conditions, and even your hormone levels. So it is prudent to avoid heat to whatever extent possible and conscientiously remove any hair from sweaty areas as it locks in foul-smelling bacteria. Other rules to follow are to avoid wearing synthetic clothes as they stick to the body and block the skin pores. Wear only cotton undergarments and avoid spicy foods as far as possible.

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