

### What is UV radiation?

Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation is a major risk factor for most skin cancers. Sunlight is the main source of UV rays. Even though UV rays make up a small portion of the sun's rays, they are the main cause of its damaging effects on skin and the DNA of skin cells. There are three main types of UV rays:

- **UVA rays** age skin cells and can damage their DNA. These rays are linked to long-term skin damage such as wrinkles but are also thought to play a role in some skin cancers.
- **UVB rays** have slightly more energy than UVA rays. They can damage skin cells' DNA directly, and are the main cause of sunburns. They are also thought to cause most skin cancers.
- **UVC rays** have more energy than the other types of UV rays, but they don't get through our atmosphere and are not contained in sunlight. They are normally not a cause of skin cancer.

### How can I protect against UV radiation?

New Mexico has some of the highest UV indexes in the country during the summer, so it's necessary to take measures to preserve the health of our skin. Whether you're swimming, hiking, or going on a long car trip, it's a good idea to apply sunscreen and bring some along with you. Here are some basic tips for protecting your skin:

- **Apply sunscreen consistently and correctly.** A good rule for buying sunscreen is to pick one that is at least SPF 15, waterproof, and broad-spectrum (protects your skin from both UVA and UVB rays).
- **Reapply.** Reapplying sunscreen every two hours when in sunlight is essential to its effectiveness. Thoroughly coat exposed skin.
- **Wear protective clothing.** Hats, sunglasses, umbrellas, and bright-colored clothing are excellent ways to protect your eyes and skin when outdoors.
- **Avoid tanning.** There is no such thing as a healthy tan. Indoor tanning is especially hazardous to skin health because it is designed to emit intense UV radiation over a short period of time.
- **Treat sunburn quickly.** If you do get a sunburn, keep it moisturized. Aloe vera gel or lotion can help heal mild sunburn. Drink plenty of fluids and be careful not to scrub or pick at the damaged skin.

### Mobile apps

- [EPA UV Index](#)
- [QSun: Sun Safety & UV Index Forecast](#)
- [Wolfram Sun Exposure](#)
- [Ultraviolet ~ UV Index](#)

### Tips from our docs

This month, our healthy tip is brought to you by **Jan Kovach, MD**, our Medical Director.

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States. Some people are at higher risk of skin cancer than others, but anyone can get it. The most preventable cause of skin cancer is overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) light, either from the sun or artificial sources like tanning beds. People with certain risk factors are more likely than others to develop skin cancer. Risk factors vary for different types of skin cancer, but some general risk factors are having:

- A lighter natural skin color.
- A family history of skin cancer.
- A personal history of skin cancer.
- Exposure to the sun through work and play.
- A history of sunburns, especially early in life.
- A history of indoor tanning.
- Skin that burns, freckles, and/or reddens.
- Blue or green eyes.
- Blond or red hair.
- Certain types and a large number of moles.

### Additional resources

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)
- [Skin Cancer Foundation](#)