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## *Don't let sunburn ruin your summer outing!*

Sunburn can ruin a summer outing (and make for a long, uncomfortable summer night). But sunburn is more than just uncomfortable. Sunburn in childhood can lead potentially fatal skin cancer later in life. Research has shown that any blistering sunburns in childhood significantly increase the risk of developing cancer later in adulthood. Therefore, protecting your child from sunburn is extremely important.

Protecting infants under the age of 6 months is even more important because a baby has very thin skin, with very little melanin, the skin's protective pigment. Babies can be outside, but should be kept out of direct sunlight and dressed in a light, one-piece outfit that covers their arms and legs. But keep in mind that babies can get burned, even while under an umbrella or covered stroller, from reflected light off of sidewalks or water.

We once had a little patient who had severe sunburn of the face. She had fallen asleep in a covered stroller, and the reflected light from a car mirror led to a blistering sunburn and a miserable night! We do recommend using sunscreens in children over the age of two months in addition to the "cover-up" protection. "Water Babies" by Coppertone, with a SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 30 or 45 is one safe option for babies, as it contains nothing toxic. Beware that even though such a product is safe for an infant, it is not nearly as effective as it is in older children. There is no substitute for avoiding direct sun exposure in an infant. And such circumstances should be avoided even if sunscreen is being used.

For children 6 months and older, regular use of sunscreens is strongly recommended. Sunscreens should be applied thirty minutes before going out into the sun for them to be most effective and should be reapplied every hour and one half to two hours. If your child will be swimming, be sure to use a sunscreen that is labeled "waterproof". Even with the waterproof agents, reapplying at least every hour and a half is strongly recommended. A good suggestion is to keep the sunscreen on the changing table and apply it first thing every morning. Applying sunscreen should be as routine as tooth brushing. Remember to apply sunscreens on cloudy days too, when 70% of the sun's rays still reach the skin.

**What strength?** The higher the SPF number, or sun protection factor, the more exposure you can tolerate. Everyone should use at least an SPF screen of 15. The American Academy of Dermatology states that if everyone used a sunscreen with SPF of 15 for the first 18 years of life, it would lower the risk of skin cancers by 78%! If your child has fair skin, light-colored eyes or hair, or freckles, using an SPF of 30 or 45 is recommended.

**One last thought:** the sun's burning rays are most intense between noon and 2 p.m. The best idea would be to keep children out of the sun for those hours. Bring them in for lunch and plan an indoor activity for after lunch. Videos and games are fine, but the first choice would be to set this aside as a reading time!

If you have questions or concerns, please call our office.