

Summer 2025

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# Health NEWS

**Is too much sun  
aging your skin?**

PAGE 2

**Make a healthy  
microwave meal**

PAGE 4

**Learn about race  
and pregnancy care**

PAGE 7

**5 simple ways to  
find your calm**

PAGE 8



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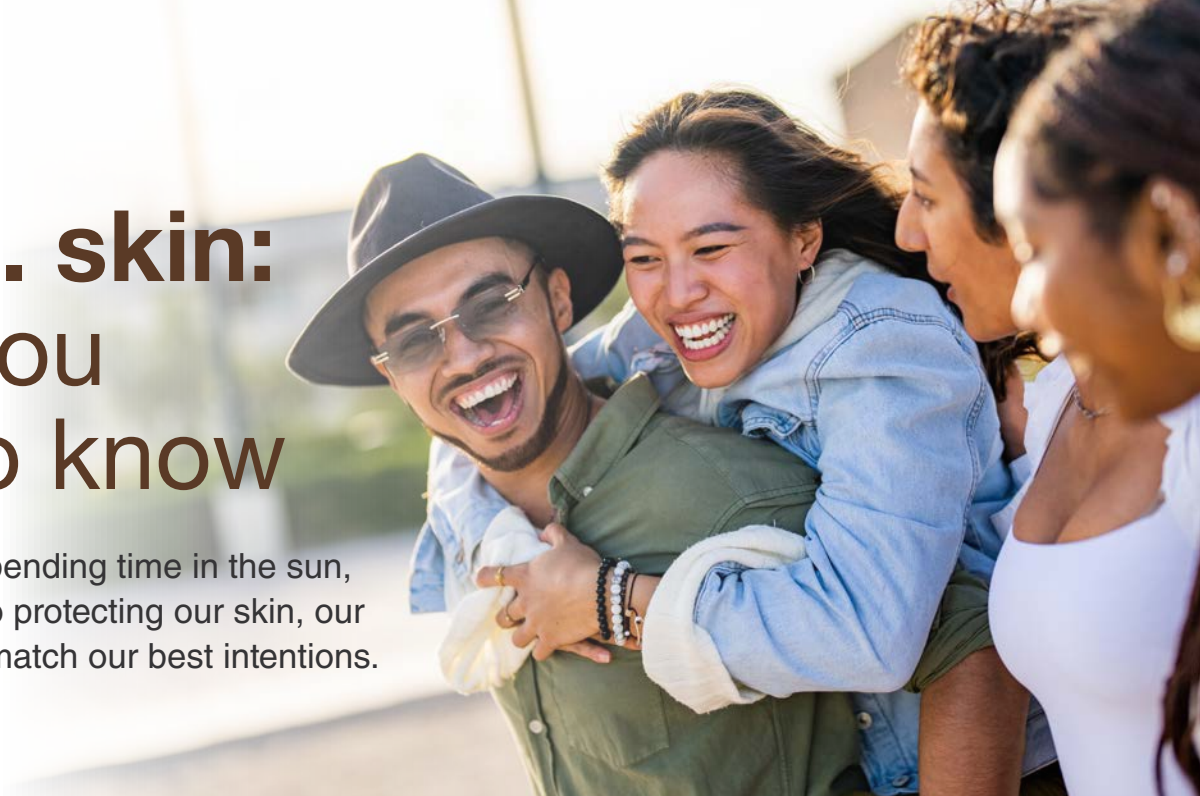
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# Sun vs. skin: What you need to know

Many people love spending time in the sun, but when it comes to protecting our skin, our habits don't always match our best intentions.



A recent survey found that 62% of Americans said they are “good” or “excellent” at protecting themselves from the sun. Yet, 65% reported that they frequently forget to reapply sunscreen. And one-third said they had gotten a sunburn.

Besides causing skin cancer, ultraviolet (UV) exposure causes skin changes that make us look older as we age.

## How sunlight ages skin

The sun's toll on your skin includes:

- **Wrinkles.** Loss of elasticity from sun exposure can make your skin sag and wrinkle.
- **Dry skin.** This especially happens on the lower legs, elbows, and forearms.
- **Age spots.** Once called “liver spots,” these harmless flat brown spots are bigger than freckles. They often show up on the face, hands, arms, back, and feet.

- **Solar keratosis.** These crusty, scaly patches may be pink, red, tan, or flesh-colored. They are more common among people with fair skin. The arms, face, scalp, and ears are frequent sites. They sometimes go away on their own but may return. Though they usually don't turn cancerous, some do — and precancerous keratoses may need treatment.

## Seeing the light

Want to lower your risk of skin cancer and keep your skin looking younger? These tips can help:

- Cover all exposed skin with a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30. “Broad spectrum” means it guards against both ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) rays. Reapply about every two hours, even if it's cloudy, and after swimming or sweating.

- Wear protective clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses.
- Seek shade. The sun's rays are strongest from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Use extra caution near water and sand. They reflect and worsen the damaging rays of the sun, increasing the odds for sunburn.
- Check your skin. If you notice anything on your skin changing, bleeding, or itching, see a dermatologist.

This advice applies to youngsters, too. Parents, protect your children by keeping them in the shade as much as possible, using protective clothing, and applying sunscreen to kids 6 months and older.

Spotting skin cancer in its beginning stages can be lifesaving. Melanoma, the deadliest form, is especially important to catch quickly. To learn how to recognize the warning signs, watch this **video**.



# Protect your mental health on hot days

Dehydration, heatstroke, and cramps aren't the only health risks that rise along with temperatures. A recent study found emergency room visits for mental health illnesses also increase on extremely hot days.

The mental conditions prone to heat-related spikes in emergency medical visits included:

- Substance use issues
- Anxiety and other stress-related disorders
- Mood disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Self-harm

## How overheating affects your mind

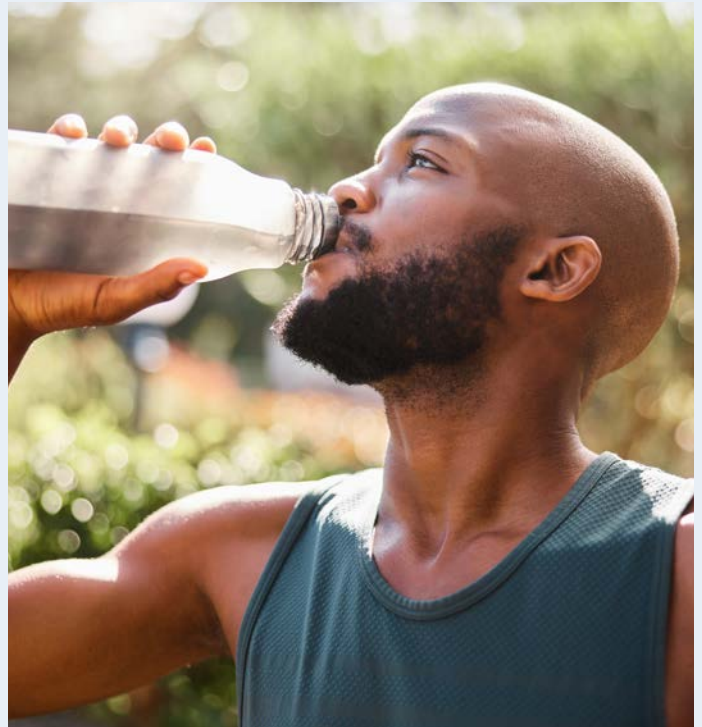
Health experts cite several possible reasons for the link between hot weather and more intense mental health issues. Extreme heat and the associated stress could worsen existing mental health problems. High temperatures can also disrupt sleep. This has a negative impact on mood and thinking.

In addition, heat waves are a sign of climate change. Many people feel hopeless, anxious, and stressed by long-term shifts in weather and temperature patterns. This, too, could contribute to poor mental health.

## Keeping your cool

To protect yourself on hot days, consider the following:

- Limit outdoor activities to early morning or evening hours. Work out inside or in a pool, if possible.
- Drink plenty of fluids — most people need about three-quarters of a gallon daily. Focus on water, and limit sugary, caffeinated, and alcoholic beverages.
- Keep your home cool with drapes or shades. Pay special attention to your bedroom. Temperatures of about 65 to 68 degrees are best for sleep.



- Look for a local cool spot if you don't have air-conditioning at home or if you lose power. Safe, free options include libraries, community centers, senior centers, or public cooling centers. To search for a cooling center in your area, call 311 or click [here](#). For more tips on staying cool during summer, click [here](#).

## Know the warning signs of emotional distress

You may have changes in eating or sleeping habits, feel hopeless, and have low energy. For support, MetroPlusHealth offers behavioral services and programs for children, teens, and adults. To learn more, click [here](#).

# Microwave magic:

## Healthy eating made easy

This humble kitchen appliance is an amazing tool for quick, nutritious meals with minimal effort.

### Why microwaving is a nutrient-saver

Boiling can wash away large amounts of vitamin C in veggies. Roasting can degrade B vitamins in meat due to prolonged heat exposure. But microwaving? Short cooking times and minimal water keep more nutrients in your food.

### Make the most of your microwave

Many of us simply punch in the time and hit start, but here are a few buttons worth exploring:

- **Reheat:** Automatically adjusts the power level and time to warm leftovers.
- **Defrost:** A faster way to thaw frozen food compared to leaving it in the fridge. But always plan to cook immediately after it's done thawing.

- **Power levels:** Using medium power (50%) heats without overcooking the outside. (Large cuts of meat should always be cooked at 50%.)

### 4 quick tips for better cooking

Microwaving works best when you follow these simple rules:

1. **Use the right vessel.** Stick to glass, paper, ceramic, or microwave-safe plastics.
2. **Add a cover.** A plain paper towel, ceramic plate, or silicone cover on top keeps food moist, helps it cook evenly, and prevents messy splatters.
3. **Stir for consistency.** Mix halfway through to avoid cold spots.
4. **Follow directions.** Let food “rest” or “stand” however long the label says.



## Cheese and broccoli quesadilla

These quesadillas are simple enough for kids to make with adult supervision.

- 1/4 cup frozen broccoli florets, thawed
- 1/4 cup shredded low-fat cheddar cheese or low-fat Mexican-blend cheese
- 1/8 tsp. onion powder
- 1/8 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/8 tsp. cumin powder
- 6-inch whole wheat tortilla

1. Using a kid-safe, hard plastic knife or hand chopper, help your child dice the broccoli florets into tiny pieces.
2. In a small bowl, let your child stir together diced broccoli, shredded cheese, and spices.
3. Put tortilla on a microwave-safe plate and cover it with a damp paper towel. Microwave for 30 seconds until it is warm.
4. Spread cheese-broccoli mixture on top of tortilla. Heat in microwave on high for about 30 to 45 seconds.
5. Fold quesadilla in half and then microwave for another 30 to 45 seconds or until cheese is melted.

Serves one. Each serving provides: 190 calories, 6 g total fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 460 mg sodium, 21 g total carbohydrate, 5 g dietary fiber, 1 g sugars, and 12 g protein.

Looking for more recipes? Click [here](#).



# A family-friendly guide to **healthier screen habits**



Kids today are practically born with a tablet in hand. While that may seem like a silly exaggeration, it's not too far off. On average, children stare at screens for seven hours every day. Some of that screen time gives parents a much-needed break. But there is such a thing as too much *Bluey*.

Being glued to a smartphone, computer, tablet, gaming console, or TV means less movement, fewer real-world interactions, and a greater risk for:

- Obesity
- Sleep disorders
- Lower grades in school
- Poor self-image, including body image issues
- Depression and anxiety

The good news? Cutting back can make a difference. In one study, kids who limited their leisure-time screen use to three hours per week saw noticeable mental health improvements within 14 days.

## **Creating healthy boundaries**

Slashing screen time to three hours a week isn't the only path to success. The American Academy of Pediatrics provides general guidelines to help families set limits based on age:

- **Up to 18 months:** Keep screen time to a minimum, like only doing video chats with grandparents.
- **18–24 months:** If introducing digital media, stick to educational programming and always watch together.
- **2–5 years:** Limit screen use to one hour per day. Stay involved through co-viewing or co-playing.
- **5 years and older:** Encourage balance. Prioritize schoolwork, sleep, physical activity, and family time over screens.

Whatever rules you set, focus on filling screens with content that is age-appropriate and encourages creativity or connection.

## **How to adjust (and avoid meltdowns)**

Telling kids to step away from screens might feel like asking them to give up oxygen. Make the transition smoother with these strategies:

- **Create a family media plan.** This plan will help you and your children set media priorities.
- **Offer fun alternatives.** Keep a list of screen-free options kids can choose from when they're bored. This "activity menu" might include things like reading or drawing, working on a puzzle, or visiting new playgrounds.
- **Lead by example.** If you want your children to prioritize dinner time conversations over devices, show them how it's done.
- **Stick with it.** Don't give in to tantrums. Within a week or two, the complaints should fade.

Remember, screen-time rules aren't one-size-fits-all. What matters most is finding a balance that works for your family.



# Resisting peer pressure when you're in recovery

Having a strong social network is a cornerstone of recovery. Your friendships should be a source of love, hope, and support. If your friends are more likely to offer you a drink or a drug than a shoulder to cry on, it's time to let them go. Remember, real friends will be there for you with whatever you need.

## Develop new friendships

Making new friends might seem like a lot of work, but it is worth the effort. Here are a few ways you might meet people:

- **Attend recovery groups.** These groups are a great way to meet like-minded people who are in similar circumstances. With them, you won't have to explain yourself when you don't want to hang out at a bar or attend a party where drinking and drug use are occurring. Also, you can support each other if one of you is slipping.
- **Rekindle old friendships.** Reach out to the childhood friend or college buddy you lost touch with after starting to use. You might have more in common again now that you're sober.
- **Join a gym or fitness group.** Not only is exercise a great way to keep your mind off using, but it's also a way to meet other people who want to stay healthy. Shape Up NYC offers free fitness classes. To look for a class, click [here](#).
- **Find a new hobby.** Join a book club or take an art, crafting, or cooking class.

## Tips to resist peer pressure

If you find yourself being pressured to use drugs or alcohol — by an old friend or a new one — here are some tips on how to decline:

- Make eye contact when you say no. This will let them know you mean it.



- Be as direct as possible. Be clear that you are not going to use.
- Suggest doing something else.
- Practice your response with a family member or another trusted person ahead of time so you'll be ready.

## We're here to help

MetroPlusHealth offers mental health and substance use programs and services. To learn more, call **800.303.9626** or click [here](#).

# Race and pregnancy care: What to know about unconscious bias

Health care providers should give every patient the same respect and care. But sometimes, they unintentionally treat people differently based on their race, age, or gender.

For example, they might overlook a symptom in an older person they would notice in someone who's younger. Or they might think a Black patient seems "difficult" because they ask a question.

When this happens, it's called unconscious bias. And according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, it can cause big problems for patients, including those who are pregnant.

## How bias can harm health

If providers have biases against pregnant people based on their race, they might miss problems before they become worse. Unconscious bias is one reason Black people have more problems during pregnancy.

## Signs of unconscious bias

Bias can cause pregnant people not to speak up for the care they deserve. You might be facing it if your provider:

- Won't answer your questions or help you
- Ignores you
- Forces you to have treatment you don't want or won't give you treatment you do want
- Dismisses serious symptoms, such as headaches, trouble breathing, or dizziness

These situations are not okay, and they're not your fault.



## How to stand up for better care

If you don't think your provider is treating you or someone else properly, you have options. You can:

- Speak up. Describe your symptoms. Say, "I know my body. This doesn't feel normal."
- Take a friend or family member to appointments. They can help you ask questions, take notes, and voice your concerns.
- Tell the provider you aren't happy. If you don't like their response, tell someone in charge at the clinic or practice. Or ask if the hospital has a patient advocate.
- Switch providers. This isn't always possible. But when it is, it can make a difference.

NYC Health and Hospitals provides high-quality health care in every borough. To make an appointment with an obstetrician, visit their Obstetrics and Gynecology (OBGYN) website [here](#). To read more on getting respectful care at birth, click [here](#).

# 5 simple ways to find your calm

You can't always avoid stress, but you can outsmart it! Try these five small but powerful **"MICROPRACTICES"** to help you take control and feel better.

## Journal your thoughts

Grab a notebook and reflect on your day or list three things you're grateful for. This short practice brings clarity and helps you gain a fresh perspective.



1

2

## Step outside

Need a quick reset? Spending a few minutes in nature can restore your focus, relax your muscles, and lower your heart rate.



3

## Take three deep breaths

Breathe in slowly through your nose, then exhale through your mouth. Deep breathing tells your brain to calm down and your body to relax.

4



## Listen to music

Sing along to let your emotions out — or play something soothing to quiet your mind. Music is a remarkable mood-booster.

5

## Try a yoga pose

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, inhale deeply, and lift your hands toward the sky. Try raising your heels off the floor. Hold briefly, then exhale while lowering back down. Taking care of yourself physically can help build inner strength.



## Feeling overwhelmed?

Help is available. MetroPlusHealth offers behavioral services and programs for children, teens, and adults. To learn more, click [here](#).