Dear Alice,

How can I prevent my summer tan from peeling?

? Sun worshipper

Answer
Dear Sun worshipper,

There is no sure fire way to protect a suntan from peeling. When human skin peels, it is because dead skin cells are shedding. Dead skin cells can not be revived; however, there are safeguards that can protect you from peeling. To that end, an a-peel-ing and proactive approach would be to use sun screen and to cover your skin to keep it from burning.

Suntans come from exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays, which most people get from the sun. In response to UV ray exposure, special cells in the skin produce more of the pigment melanin as a protection against the harmful effects of UV rays. Melanin is what darkens the skin, producing a suntan. The skin can only produce a certain amount of melanin each day, so there is a limited amount of tanning that can be acquired.

Overexposure to the sun may cause a sunburn, premature aging of the skin, dryness, and skin cancer. Skin cells are destroyed, and there can be damage to the blood vessels underneath the skin. Worry about skin cancer doesn't usually tend to begin until a person is middle age because that is when changes in the skin become more noticeable. Nevertheless, it is never too late to begin protecting oneself from too much ultraviolet ray exposure, unfortunately by middle age most of the sun damage is already done. Studies estimate that on average, humans receive approximately 80 percent of their lifetime UV ray exposure by the time they are 20 years old.

It is recommended that when planning to spend a large amount of time in the sun, do so gradually. On the first day limit yourself to only 15 minutes of sun exposure, and then increase by 15 minutes every day until you can tolerate one hour. At that point you should be able to expose yourself all day using a sunscreen.

In short, to keep from peeling (and prevent future wrinkles and skin damage), use sun screen and shelter to moderate your exposure to the sun. Take care,

Alice!

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Published date:
Oct 20, 1995
Last reviewed on:
Jul 09, 2015

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