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Tips for A Healthy Vacation

Planning your next vacation? While having fun in the sun, consider these tips to make sure your trip is a healthy one.

Avoid Tanning, Be Sun Safe–Thinking about getting a "healthy tan" over vacation? Think again. When you're exposed to sunlight, an increase in your skin pigment (called "melanin") can be a sign of damage. Ultraviolet radiation from the sun can cause wrinkles and dark spots among other problems—and tanning puts you at higher risk for skin cancer. Plus, sunlight reflecting off of sand or water increases exposure to UV radiation and increases your risk of developing eye problems.

But sunny days can still figure into your trip. Here's how to be sun safe.

***Use sunscreen. Wear a broad spectrum sunscreen that protects against UVA and UVB rays, and choose an SPF of 15 or higher. You need at least one ounce of sunscreen lotion (the size of a golf ball) to cover your body. Reapply at least every 2 hours, or every 40 to 80 minutes when swimming or sweating, according to the directions on the product label. And limit the time your skin is exposed to the sun between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.**

***Wear sunglasses. Certain sunglasses can help protect your eyes. Choose sunglasses labeled with a UVA/UVB rating of 100% to get the most UV protection.**

***Wear protective clothing. Consider wearing a hat and clothing that covers skin exposed to the sun. Try to stay in the shade under an umbrella or limit your time in the sun—especially between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when the sun's rays are most intense.**

***Understand the facts about tanning beds. You may be tempted to "pre-tan" before a beach vacation. But don't. The lamps in these beds emit ultraviolet radiation that can be more intense and harmful than the sun. The FDA recommends carefully reading the instructions and warnings before using these beds. Also note that tanning pills and accelerators are not approved by the FDA.**

***Beware of spray tans and bronzers. Know that spray-on tanning and oronzings products are not UV protective.**

Be careful with contact lenses. If you wear contact lenses, be sure you have the supplies you need to last the trip. To avoid problems such as eye infections and corneal ulcers, make sure your contacts are prescribed by an eye care professional. Skip colored or decorative lenses sold in beauty supply stores or at

the boardwalk, since they can damage your eyes.

Wash your hands before touching lenses, and use sterile solution. Never expose your lenses to saliva or non-sterile water, including that from the tap, bottle, or ocean. (Non-sterile water can put you at risk for an eye infection.) So remove your contacts before swimming or getting in the hot tub and follow your eye care professional's other care and removal instructions. Also remember to bring glasses in case your eyes become irritated. If your vision changes, your eyes get red, you have lots of tears, or your eyes hurt or feel itchy, take out your contact lenses and seek medical attention.

Think twice about getting tattoos or henna on vacation. Tattoos and henna shop are often found on boardwalks and other areas around the beach. Whether you consider something non-permanent (like henna) or an actual tattoo, think before you ink. Getting a tattoo can put you at risk for serious infections like HIV or hepatitis if you are exposed to unclean tools, practices, or products. Plus, tattoo inks can cause allergic or otherwise bad reactions.

The FDA has not approved any inks for injecting in the skin and, as a general matter, does not actively regulate tattoo parlors. The FDA also hasn't approved henna or hair dye for skin use, and some people have reported serious problems after using henna, including allergic reactions such as rashes and scarring.

Stay hydrated and eat healthy. Dehydration happens when your body does not have as much water and fluids as it should. It can be mild, moderate, or severe. So avoid getting dehydrated. For instance, when you spend a late afternoon at the beach (remember sun safety!) Bring water and drink even before you feel thirsty. That said, beware of ice or tap water in places where the water isn't safe to drink.

Along with staying hydrated, try to make healthy food choices. If you're at a buffet, you can follow the dietary guidelines, for instance, by first filling your plate with fruits, vegetables and whole grains and then adding the protein source.