Care of Sunburn

Sunburn is damage to the skin caused by overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays. Sun exposure can start to injure within 30 minutes. Skin will become red in 2 to 4 hours with peak effects in 12 to 24 hours. Skin loss or peeling usually occurs in 4 to 7 days after sun exposure. The resulting soreness and swelling (*inflammation*) causes pain and/or blisters.

A **first-degree burn** is minimal damage of the outer layer of the skin (*epidermis*). The skin is red, painful and slightly swollen.

A **second-degree burn** involves the deeper layer of the skin (*dermis*). It is characterized by blisters. These still heal without scarring as long as they are well cared for and do not progress to a third-degree burn through infection.

Healing for first-degree and second-degree burns should occur in several days if there are no complications. Repeated sun exposure causes early skin aging. This includes wrinkles and sun spots. It also increases risk of skin cancer. Individuals with light skin or a fair complexion may be more susceptible to sunburn.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS:

- Avoid further exposure to the sun.
- Keep the sunburned area cool. Cool baths and cool compresses may be helpful, if used several times per day. Do not apply ice, since this may result in frostbite.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Use aloe or other over-the-counter sunburn aftercare preparations may offer some relief. Putting on a moisturizing cream a couple times per day will help keep the skin moist. Do not use on blisters.
- Use hydrocortisone cream or spray 3 to 4 times per day and taking anti-inflammatory medications by mouth may help cut down on itching and inflammation.
- Drink enough water and fluids to keep the urine clear or pale yellow.

If blisters break:

- Thoroughly, but gently, wash the area twice daily with soap and water.
- Cover with a sterile gauze to prevent infection.

Your caregiver may prescribe cream to discourage infection.

PREVENTION:

Remember, sunburn prevention is the most important aspect regarding sunburn. Use a sunscreen or sunblock with SPF 30 or greater.

- Use a sunscreen at least 30 minutes before exposure.
- Always wear protective hats, clothing and sunglasses with UV protection. Closing the eyes will not completely protect your eyes against UV rays.
- Avoid medications, herbs and foods that increase sensitivity to sunlight.
- Avoid tanning beds.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You or your child has an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medication.
- Pain is uncontrolled with medications.
- You or your child develops vomiting or diarrhea.
- You or your child feels faint or develops a headache with confusion.
- You or your child develops severe blistering.

- The burn becomes infected with increasing inflammation or pus-like (*purulent*) discharge.
- The burn becomes more painful and swollen.

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