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Essential Tips for Treating Sunburn

July 20, 2015 By Dr. Mercola

How to Treat a Sunburn Naturally

If you accidentally spend too much time in the sun and end up with a sunburn, one of the most effective first-aid strategies I know of is to apply raw aloe vera gel topically to the burn. It's loaded with powerful glyconutrients that accelerate healing. Research has shown applying aloe to sunburn offers both anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving effects, likely due to its antioxidant components. Aloe is also easy to grow if you live in a southern location, and is an excellent medicinal plant to keep in your home garden (or keep one in a pot on your balcony). You need to be careful of the species, as many have very flat leaves with virtually no gel. The best plants have the thickest leaves. If you don't have your own plant, you may be able to find fresh whole aloe leaves at your local grocery store. They are relatively easy to propagate and you can turn one plant into six or more in under a year. I now have about 300 aloe vera plants on my property, which I use both for oral and topical use. After cutting the leaf from the plant, cut off the prickly edges. Then, using a peeler, peel the skin off one side. You can now rub the jelly side directly on your sunburn. For a demonstration, see the video above. Apply it five times a day until your condition improves. In addition to fresh aloe, you can try:

- **Cold compress:** Applying cold compresses to the sunburned area can help lessen the burning pain. Try soaking a soft cloth in milk or egg whites, as the proteins will help coat and calm the burn. Soaking the compress in green tea can help reduce inflammation.
- **Cool shower or bath:** This will help you cool down, soothe your skin, and also remove any salt water, chlorine, or sand that could be irritating your skin.
- **Moisturize:** Sunburned skin lacks moisture, so applying a natural moisturizer like coconut oil can help your skin immensely.
- **Stay hydrated:** A sunburn can leave you dehydrated, so be sure to stay properly hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Young children, in particular, need to be carefully monitored for signs of dehydration.

To avoid further irritation, do not wash sunburned skin with harsh soaps, and avoid applying petroleum jelly, as it may exacerbate the burn. It is also a petrochemical that is loaded with toxins you don't want in your system. If you don't have aloe vera on hand, there are plenty of other topical food-based remedies that can also help ease the pain and speed healing. For example, you can try:

- **Potatoes** - Potatoes have starch-based compounds that may help soothe sunburn. Chop an uncooked potato into slices, and rub or pat down a piece on your sunburned spots. You can also try grating a cold raw potato and applying it as a poultice.
- **Honey** - The ancient Egyptians were known to use honey as a topical salve for skin burns. Just make sure you're using high-quality honey, such as raw organic honey, or Manuka honey, which has very potent medicinal qualities. The "Grade A" type honey you find in most grocery stores is more akin to high fructose corn syrup, which is more likely to increase infection, and should not be used to treat topical wounds.
- **Vinegar** - The acetic acid found in vinegar is said to reduce pain, itching, and inflammation. Add a cup of apple cider vinegar into your bath water and soak in it. It can also work like a natural aspirin. Simply dab a bit of white vinegar on to your sunburn for

20 minutes for instant pain relief.

- **Green tea** - Green tea's catechin and tannic acid help soothe sunburn pain. Soak a couple of tea bags in cool water. You can either use the tea bags themselves as a cold compress on the burnt areas or wash your face gently with the cold tea extract. Studies also suggest that drinking just two cups of green tea a day can provide additional sun-protective benefits.
- **Cucumbers** - With cucumber's cooling effect, simply putting it on top of your sunburn is guaranteed to provide instant soothing effects. You can also use it as a paste by mashing it and applying it on your skin.
- **Lettuce** - To take advantage of lettuce's painkilling benefits, boil its leaves in water. After straining, allow the liquid to cool. Keep it chilled inside the refrigerator. Using clean organic cotton balls, carefully apply the lettuce juice over the affected area.
- **Calendula** - It has natural anti-inflammatory and healing properties that are especially beneficial for burns. Although there are many calendula creams sold in drugstores today, you can make your own calendula poultice using fresh calendula blossoms for faster healing of your sunburns.
- **Coriander oil** - For a soothing effect, use it as an essential oil by lightly rubbing it, diluted, onto your sunburn.

Sensible Sun Exposure Is a Key Part of Healthy Living

Sunburn should be avoided but please don't completely shun the sun to avoid getting burned. If you avoid the sun, you'll be missing out on crucial vitamin D, as well as sunshine's gifts that extend well beyond vitamin D production. Five of the many noteworthy properties of spending some quality time in the sun include:

1. Pain-killing (analgesic) properties
2. Increased subcutaneous fat metabolism
3. Regulation of human lifespan (solar cycles appear to be able to directly affect the human genome, thereby influencing lifespan)
4. Daytime sun exposure improves evening alertness
5. Conversion to metabolic energy (i.e. we may "ingest" energy directly from the sun, like plants do)

To continuously enjoy the positive effects of sun exposure without getting burned, I recommend following these simple safety tips:

- **Protect your face and eyes by wearing a wide-brimmed hat or a cap.** The skin around these areas is much thinner than other areas of your body and is more at risk for cosmetic photo damage and premature wrinkling. If it's too hot to protect your skin by covering with light clothing, and you'll be outside for extended periods, be sure to use a natural broad-spectrum sunscreen on your skin – these products often contain zinc.
- **Limit your initial exposure and slowly work your way up.** If you are a fairly light-skinned individual who tends to burn easily, limit your initial exposure to just a few minutes, especially if it is in the middle of summer. The more tanned your skin gets, the longer you can stay in the sun without burning. If it is early or late in the season and/or you are a dark-skinned individual, you could likely safely have 30 minutes on your initial exposure.
- **Build an internal sunscreen with beneficial antioxidants.** Astaxanthin, the potent antioxidant, can also be used both internally and topically to protect your skin from the sun. You can make your own lotion by adding astaxanthin to organic coconut oil, but be careful of staining your clothing as astaxanthin is a very dark red. Other helpful antioxidants include proanthocyanidins, resveratrol, and lycopene.
- **Moisturize your skin naturally.** Before sunbathing, apply organic coconut oil on the exposed areas of your skin (as noted above, you could add some astaxanthin to the oil for

an added measure of protection). This will not only moisturize your skin to prevent dryness, but will also give you additional metabolic benefits.