

## FEATURE ARTICLE

# Protect the Skin You're In – Why Sun Safety Is Longevity Medicine

By Erika Schwartz, MD

Pioneer in Personalized Hormone and Longevity Medicine



July is when nature invites us outdoors—to move, to rest, and to soak in the sun's warmth. But in the context of longevity, this invitation comes with a deeper message: **your skin is both a shield and a signal**, and how you care for it determines how gracefully you age.

We often think of sun safety as a cosmetic concern. But the truth is, **UV exposure is one of the most studied—and modifiable—risk factors for premature aging** and serious diseases like skin cancer. In fact, **up to 90% of visible skin aging is attributed to sun exposure alone** (Gilchrest, 2013).

### THE DUAL ROLE OF SUNLIGHT IN LONGEVITY

Sunlight is essential—it **regulates our circadian rhythms, supports mood, and helps synthesize vitamin D**, which plays a critical role in immune health, bone density, and hormone balance (Holick, 2007). But chronic overexposure, especially without protection, comes at a cost.

**Ultraviolet A (UVA) and B (UVB) rays damage cellular DNA, trigger oxidative stress, and degrade collagen and elastin**, leading not only to wrinkles and pigmentation but also to immune suppression and carcinogenesis (Narayanan et al., 2010).

### SKIN HEALTH IS SYSTEMIC HEALTH

Your skin is your body's largest organ—and one of its most intelligent. It's your first line of defense against pathogens, a detox channel, and a neuroendocrine hub. When it's inflamed or damaged by UV light, it doesn't just show up on the surface.

**UV damage increases systemic inflammation, contributing** to what researchers call “inflammaging”—a low-grade, chronic inflammatory state linked to age-related diseases including cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, and metabolic syndrome (Franceschi et al., 2000).

### SMART SUMMER SKIN STRATEGIES

So how do we enjoy the sunshine and protect our skin in ways that support long-term health? Here are some evidence-backed, longevity-focused tips:

- **Time your exposure:** Aim for early morning or late afternoon sun, when UV intensity is lower. Just 10–15 minutes of direct sun exposure on arms and legs can help maintain adequate vitamin D without harm (Wacker & Holick, 2013).

- **Use broad-spectrum protection:** Look for **mineral sunscreens with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide**, which offer consistent protection and are less likely to disrupt hormones (Krause et al., 2012).
- **Feed your skin from within:** **Antioxidants like polyphenols, flavonoids, and carotenoids—found in berries, tomatoes, green tea, and leafy greens—can enhance skin's resilience to UV damage** (Grether-Beck et al., 2020). Think of these as internal sunscreen.
- **Hydrate strategically:** Dehydrated skin is more prone to UV damage and aging. Sip water throughout the day and include hydrating foods like watermelon, cucumber, and citrus. **Hyaluronic acid-rich foods and collagen peptides may also support skin barrier health** (Schunck et al., 2021).
- **Don't skip the extras:** Hats, UPF-rated clothing, sunglasses, and seeking shade during peak UV hours are **underrated but powerful tools** in your anti-aging strategy.

### LONGEVITY ISN'T ABOUT AVOIDANCE—IT'S ABOUT AWARENESS

Sunlight isn't the enemy—it's one of nature's oldest medicines. But like all medicine, **it's the dose and the delivery that matter most**. By practicing sun safety, we're not just protecting our appearance—we're supporting our immunity, reducing our disease risk, and slowing cellular aging.

Let this July be your reminder that wellness and enjoyment aren't opposites. They're aligned when you're informed and intentional. The glow of good health doesn't have to fade—it just needs to be protected.

### REFERENCES

- Gilchrest, B. A. (2013). Photoaging. *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*, 133(E1), E2–E6.
- Holick, M. F. (2007). Vitamin D deficiency. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 357(3), 266–281.
- Narayanan, D. L., Saladi, R. N., & Fox, J. L. (2010). Ultraviolet radiation and skin cancer. *International Journal of Dermatology*, 49(9), 978–986.
- Franceschi, C., et al. (2000). Inflamm-aging: an evolutionary perspective on immunosenescence. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 908(1), 244–254.
- Wacker, M., & Holick, M. F. (2013). Sunlight and Vitamin D: A global perspective for health. *Dermato-Endocrinology*, 5(1), 51–108.