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Treating sunburn at home

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Heat. Burning. Itching. Blistering. It's hard to sleep, or even put on clothes. Now you regret staying out in the sun too long and coming down with a case of garden-variety sunburn.

One of the best remedies can be found right at home, says Dr. Tara Kaufmann, clinical assistant professor of dermatology at Stony Brook University Medical Center. "Keep the skin cool," she says. "Take a cool bath or shower, and then use a cool compress — a towel soaked in cool water," to keep the skin hydrated.

Dr. Ariel Ostad, clinical assistant professor of dermatology at New York University, adds that moisturizers also help. "Moisturizers will not prevent peeling or blistering," he says. "But they do keep your new skin from drying out. I suggest using a moisturizing lotion, such as Eucerin or Aquaphor, to help keep the skin moist."

What about sprays that contain local anesthetic? Be wary, Kaufmann says. They can give temporary relief. But "some people can be sensitive to them or irritated by them, so try them out on a small area of skin before using them."

Finally, Ostad says, look to over-the-counter medications, such as aspirin, ibuprofen or acetaminophen, for pain.

Speaking of pain, Ostad says, damage to the top layer of skin is known as a superficial, or first-degree, burn. The skin turns red and swells slightly; superficial burns, he says, are usually very painful.

If the damage has reached the second layer of skin, it is known as a partial thickness, or second-degree, burn, Ostad says. The skin will turn deep red or purple and will swell, blister and may weep (this is a slow, steady discharge of water). Partial-thickness burns are even more painful because the nerve endings in the skin have been damaged. These burns, he cautions, require medical treatment.

What do you do once the pain is over and the skin begins to peel? Leave it alone, Kaufmann says. "Leave it intact. Don't be too aggressive about peeling the skin. Let it peel on its own."

Home remedies

Some old-fashioned remedies actually work to ease a sunburn. Here are three to try:

1. **Mix** barley, yogurt and turmeric and apply to skin.
2. **Combine** cold aloe vera gel, apple-cider vinegar or plantain and apply.
3. **Dip** some gauze in cold milk and apply to skin.