

# Sunlight and Health

by Peeka Trenkle

“The importance of sunlight for physical development and preservation is much undervalued. Women and children, as well as men, in order to be healthy and well-developed, should spend a large portion of each day where the solar rays can reach them directly”

- E. Harris Ruddock, MD, 19th century homeopath

Summer is here, the brightest and hottest time of the year, and the time of year when most people are spending more time outdoors in the sun.

In recent years a lot of attention has been given to the dangers of sun exposure and, while it is true that too much sunlight is damaging to the skin and heightens the risk of skin cancers, it is also true that the benefits of sunlight are essential for vital health. There are several physiological processes that are dependant upon sunlight. The most familiar of these is the skin's ability to manufacture vitamin D. This can occur only in the presence of sunlight but it does not have to be direct exposure to the sun's rays. Sitting in the shade on a sunny day is also sufficient to stimulate this process. The body needs vitamin D in order to assimilate calcium into the bones. Too little vitamin D and there is more likelihood of improper bone development in children and osteoporosis in adults.

Another process governed by exposure to sunlight is the balancing and regulating of our circadian rhythms, the natural physical fluctuations that occur in relation to day and night, through the pineal gland. The pineal gland produces melatonin, a hormone that governs the ability to sleep and also it is thought to play a role in the initiation of puberty. The production of melatonin is dependant upon exposure to light and to darkness. In natural settings, without artificial light, it is this balance of light and dark that inhibits and stimulates production of melatonin. Rather than taking a melatonin supplement, going out for a walk in the morning light and making sure your bedroom is dark at night when you sleep can greatly help to maintain proper levels of melatonin in your body.

The sun's ultraviolet rays are also antiseptic. It was common practice a century ago to treat tuberculosis patients with exposure to sunlight. And it is true that moderate exposure to sunlight can increase overall immunity.

It is important to be sensible about being in the sun. Too much of a good thing where sun exposure is concerned can be risky. Around the world it is customary to go indoors at the hottest time of day, when the sun is at its strongest. Nowhere has there ever been a custom of undressing and lying in the sun at midday until the 20th century. Sunscreens only encourage the idea that this is a safe practice. In fact, the incidence of skin cancer tripled between 1980 and 2000 - a period of time with the greatest use of sunscreen.

Peeka Trenkle is an herbalist & homeopathic consultant with a private practice in NYC & Denville, NJ. She is a long time advocate for natural health & healing & has been in practice for over 25 years. She is a professional member of the American Herbalists Guild & is a graduate of The School of Homeopathy, NY.

Living in a natural relationship with the environment is always strengthening to health and vitality - this includes enjoying the healing benefits of sunshine.

- ✦ Stay out of the sun between 10am and 2pm.
- ✦ Remember that the use of sunscreens encourages the idea that staying in the hot sun for long periods of time is safe.
- ✦ Cover up with light clothing rather than using sunscreen - and if using sunscreen choose one with natural ingredients.
- ✦ Eat a diet rich in antioxidants to keep the skin healthy.
- ✦ Eliminate hydrogenated oils, trans-fats, and chemicals from the diet. Residues from these substances can be deposited under the skin by the lymphatic system and, combined with the heat and ultraviolet rays of the sun, can be a contributing factor in the development of melanomas.