

What is chemotherapy-related photosensitivity?

Some chemotherapy drugs may make the skin more sensitive to sunlight. This is called photosensitivity. It looks much like sunburn and can occur after being in the sun for a very short amount of time. Photosensitivity can continue for a few months after treatment is finished so sun protection is important during this time. Some chemotherapy medications that cause your skin to be more sensitive include: fluorouracil, dacarbazine (DTIC), methotrexate and vinblastine.

What can I do to help protect my skin from the sun?

1. Become sun aware

Learning more about the sun can allow you to still enjoy the outdoors while decreasing your risk of sunburn.

Here are some tips:

- Try not to go out in the sun from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. since this is when the sun's rays are the strongest
- Before going outside, check the weather forecast for the daily UV Index. On days when the UV Index reaches 3 or more, you need to be extra careful to protect your skin
- If your shadow is shorter than you, it's time to find some shade
- Choose to sit under a tree at the park or under an awning on a restaurant patio

2. Protect yourself from the sun

Wearing the appropriate sunscreen and protective gear is very important to prevent sunburns.

These tips can help you protect your skin from the sun:

- Use sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30
- Make sure the sunscreen is labelled broad-spectrum (offers both UVA and UVB protection)
- Apply 30 minutes to 1 hour before going out in the sun and reapply as per product label
- When outside, cover up with a long-sleeved shirt, long pants or skirt and a broad-brimmed hat
- Wear sunglasses that are close-fitting with UVA and UVB protection
- Don't use indoor tanning beds or sun lamps