

**IN THIS ISSUE**

Shedding Some Light on Sunscreen ..... 1  
 10 Steps to Breaking a Bad Habit ..... 2  
 Relief for Neck and Shoulder Stiffness ..... 4

**Shedding Some Light on Sunscreen**

Summertime. Beach time. Long hours in the sun. Before you head out to the white hot sand, you'll want to pick up some sunscreen. But should you buy SPF 15? SPF 30? How about 45?

Should you get a sun block? A sunscreen? Something that's waterproof?

If you're confused by the numbers and types of sunscreen, welcome to the club. Many Americans, it seems, are so confused by sunscreens that they don't even use them. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that only about 30 percent of adults regularly use sunscreen.

But take heart. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is writing new rules for sunscreen labeling, to help consumers figure out just what they need. All sunscreen products sold over the counter will need to follow certain labeling standards, and any SPF rating must have been tested to pass muster.



The FDA has proposed creating a new SPF category called 30-plus for any sun protection factor above 30. It has also proposed reducing five sun protection categories to three: minimum, moderate and high. No longer will terms such as "sunblock" and "waterproof" be allowed on labels, because they are inaccurate, the FDA says.

The agency has also listed 16 active ingredients, including zinc oxide and avobenzone, that are allowed in sunscreens.

In addition, the labels will also need to include a statement that emphasizes the importance of sunscreen in preventing skin problems and other harmful effects of the sun.

**How do sunscreens work?**

When ultraviolet (UV) rays strike the skin, they cause changes, including mutations in DNA. These mutations affect how well the DNA controls cell division, and can lead to cancer, experts say. The longer the skin's exposure to the sun, the greater the risk of developing skin problems.

Sunscreens work by absorbing and reflecting UV rays, preventing them from penetrating the skin. No sunscreen can block out 100 percent of the UV rays, however. That's why terms like "sunblock" are inaccurate.

Because sunlight contains both UVA and UVB rays, it's important to select a sunscreen that blocks both kinds, experts say. All children over 6 months of age and all adults should wear sunscreen. Lighter skinned people, particularly those with red or blond hair, are at greatest risk for burning.

## Tips for avoiding the sun

Stay out of the sun, particularly from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the sunlight -- and the UV rays -- are strongest. Look for shade, but be aware that a beach umbrella or shade tree can't block all UV rays. And a bright beach or snow-covered ground causes the UV rays to bounce around.

You are still at risk on cloudy days, because clouds block only about 20 percent of UV rays.

If you must be out in the sun, cover up with loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirt and pants to protect your skin.

Wear a hat with a brim three to four inches wide to protect your face, head, neck and ears.

Wear sunglasses that block as much UVA and UVB rays as possible. Sunglasses that wrap around your eyes are best, because they block UV rays from the sides.

Apply sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 and one that offers protection from both UVA and UVB rays. Use at least an ounce of sunscreen each time you apply it. Reapply every couple hours, or more frequently if you are swimming or sweating.

Remember that water doesn't block UV rays. Even if you spend most of your day in the water, you still need sunscreen.

Children need protection from the sun, too. Give your child a wide-brimmed hat and don't forget the sunscreen.

## Warning signs of skin cancer

Up to 1 million Americans are diagnosed with skin cancer each year, and experts say that number is on the rise.

Skin cancer comes in three types: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma. The first two types are the most common forms of skin cancer and are easily treated. If left untreated, however, they can cause disfigurement, but they aren't deadly.

Although melanoma is less common, it is more serious. If caught early, it is almost always curable. Melanoma is more likely than the other two forms of skin cancer to spread to other organs in the body.

The American Cancer Society and other experts urge people to regularly examine their skin for new moles or moles that change their shape or color.

The risk factors for melanoma include: moles, particularly a type called an atypical mole; fair skin; family history of melanoma; people whose immune system has been suppressed; large doses of UV radiation through sun exposure; severe, blistering sunburns, especially during childhood.

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## 10 Steps to Breaking a Bad Habit



You have to finish an important project in two hours, so you reflexively head to the snack machine for a high-calorie treat. You're stuck in traffic with an important meeting on tap, and you start biting your nails to the bone. You know you should get to bed and get some sleep, but you can't seem to pull yourself away from the television.

If any of this sounds familiar, you may be among the many Americans mired in a stress-producing bad habit.

A habit is a recurrent, often unconscious pattern of behavior. All people

have habits, says Jim McGee, Ph.D., a psychologist who is an expert on habitual behavior.

"If we didn't have the natural tendency toward habit, our behavior would be chaotic and random," he says.

But even though habits are natural, bad habits can be self-destructive, experts say. Good habits such as exercising or talking with a friend can relieve stress in your life. Bad habits can create everything from bad relationships to health problems.

So why do we have bad habits?

They're unhealthy coping mechanisms that have an immediate payoff, says Dr. McGee.

"Biting nails has the short-term effect of reducing nervousness and anxiety, but the long-term effect is that it makes your nails look crummy."

If a habit begins to interfere with your enjoyment of life, it's an indication that something must be changed. He also warns that using substances like nicotine or alcohol may result in a health-threatening addiction. In that case, professional help may be warranted.

If you're just dealing with an annoying habit, however, your impetus to change may be simple frustration: One day you wake up and are sick and tired of doing things the way you've been doing them. At that point, you're ready to move forward.

## Step-by-step action plan

Well, if you're tired of your nubby nails or the headaches that come from too much coffee, you may be ready to adopt a step-by-step action plan that includes the following:

**Step 1:** Define the habit. Before you can change, you must identify the reason for the habit. Bad habits, from lateness to laziness, often serve a hidden purpose we don't recognize, such as avoiding hurt or disappointment or establishing control, experts say.

**Step 2:** Make a full commitment. That's the advice of Neal L. Benowitz, M.D., a national expert on the effects of nicotine at the University of California at San Francisco. "One of the main predictors of success in changing any behavior is motivation," Dr. Benowitz says. "And it must come from within yourself."

**Step 3:** Set short- and long-term goals. Do you want to finally lose that 25 pounds? Dr. McGee says you need to decide exactly what your ultimate goal is, and then break it down into small increments you can actually accomplish. "You're not going to lose 25 pounds the first week," he says, "maybe only 8 ounces."

**Step 4:** Define and eliminate your triggers. Do business calls make you reach for a cigarette? Experts say that when quitting a bad habit, you need to set up situations in which the habit would be prohibited. Examples: Make calls from a smokeless environment; clear your pantry of junk food.

**Step 5:** Get support. "Change is more fun and more likely to be successful if you have a partner," says Dr. McGee. Support can come in the form of an established group, like Weight Watchers, or from an understanding friend or mate. Telling someone about your commitment, says Dr. McGee, helps to make it stick.

**Step 6:** Replace a bad habit with a good one. A good habit, like exercising or using relaxation techniques, can help you manage stress in a healthy way. If you want to cut back on a nighttime television habit, for instance, you might find it helpful to check out a gym instead, even if all you do is hang out the first few times.

**Step 7:** Use reinforcements. Some people may need to create artificial roadblocks to keep themselves on target. The national group Action on Smoking and Health advises you to wrap your pack of cigarettes in cellophane and then put five rubber bands around it. The pack may be so tough to get into that you'll forgo some cigarettes rather than wrestle with the rubber bands and plastic.

**Step 8:** Give yourself rewards. A weekend away? You'll certainly deserve one if you keep to your goals. But don't overdo it: Rewarding yourself with six chocolate bars for losing weight is counterproductive. Instead, reward yourself with new clothes.

**Step 9:** Accept plateaus. According to Dr. McGee, behavior change follows a predictable curve, rising quickly at first, reaching a plateau, and then rising more slowly with still more plateaus. "You're going to get discouraged and want to quit because you're not making much progress," says Dr. McGee. "If you know to expect this, you'll be more prepared to stay with your goal."

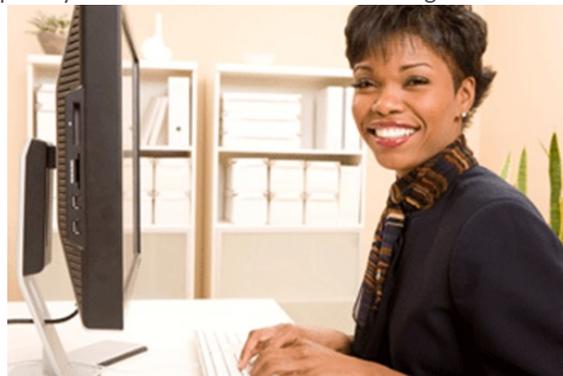
**Step 10:** Be kind to yourself. Having a bad habit doesn't make you a bad person. The more you tell yourself you are bad, the more likely you'll indulge your bad habit to relieve your stress.

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## Relief for Neck and Shoulder Stiffness

If you find yourself sitting at a desk the majority of your workday, you may frequently suffer from neck and shoulder tightness. Stress, poor posture while sitting or standing, and prolonged keyboard use can all cause this stiffness. However, there are exercises and stretches that you can use during your workday to release and relieve any tension or stress that has built up in your aching muscles.

Start seated with feet flat on the floor, your low back supported (use a pillow if needed), and lifting through the chest. If the following activities cause any pain or dizziness, or you have a history of neck and/or shoulder problems, check with your doctor before you do the following exercises.



### Start with Breath

First, close your eyes and inhale and exhale deeply. Repeat this four times. Next, take four more breaths; with the inhale move your arms up toward the ceiling, and with the exhale drop your palms by your sides.

### Release Tension in the Neck

1. Drop your head forward, feeling the stretch in the back of the neck. Hold this for up to 30 seconds, breathing through the back of the neck. Then, raise the head so your chin is level with the floor, and repeat a few more times.
2. Move your right ear toward your right shoulder, tilting your head to one side. Keep the head directly over the shoulder and relax through the neck. Hold up to 30 seconds, breathing through the sides of the neck the entire time, and then bring the head back up, and move the left ear toward the left shoulder, repeating the process. Try this a few times on each side.
3. Tuck the chin to the chest as far as it will go, and breathe into the neck for up to 10 seconds. Release, let the chin come level with the floor, and repeat up to 10 times.

### Release Tension in the Shoulders:

1. Interlace your fingers behind your head and press your elbows towards one another. Imagine your shoulder blades touching. Hold for up to 10 seconds, then relax, rest the arms, and repeat up to 10 times.
2. Begin moving the shoulders around in circles and try to make as large as an arc as you can. Breathe into the shoulders and the muscles around the shoulders; make up to 15 circles.

Raise your arms so they are parallel with the floor and at the same height as your shoulders. Try not to lock the elbows, and begin rotating the arms 10 times forward and 10 times backward. Lower the arms and take a little break, then repeat the exercise.

### Long-Term Neck and Shoulder Relief

These exercises can help release tension, but try to isolate what's causing the stress in the first place. Posture is a great thing to focus on first: Are you slouching, twisting, straining your head forward to see the monitor, or not taking breaks? Try to address why the body is holding onto stress and tension in the neck or shoulder area.

Adjusting your body to healthier workday habits can lead to long-term relief for your neck and shoulder stiffness.

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