

Are there benefits to spending time outdoors?

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Due to the COVID-19 crisis some of us may be spending more time outdoors than usual. This could be due to the need to exercise outdoors because fitness and other facilities are closed or limited use during this time. Perhaps is a response to the need to stay away from shopping, dining and other activities keeping us at home more, or maybe it is simply because the weather is nicer this time of year. Spending time outdoors can improve overall health and wellness but it can also increase your risk of skin cancer. The outdoors offers many opportunities to be physically active. Time outdoors may also promote mental health and stress reduction. While enjoying the benefits of being outdoors, people can decrease skin cancer risk from too much UV exposure by using sun protection. Protect yourself by staying in the shade, wearing protective clothing, and applying and re-applying a broad spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.

Ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun can stimulate production of vitamin D in the skin. Having little or no sun exposure may put a person at risk for low levels of vitamin D, but too much UV exposure from the sun or artificial sources can increase risk of skin cancers and eye disease. CDC data show that most people in the United States are getting enough vitamin D. The amount of vitamin D a person's skin makes when they are in the sun depends on many factors, including skin tone, geographic location, weather conditions, time of year, and time of day. You can also get Vitamin D through your diet. Food sources of Vitamin D include some types of fish; foods with added Vitamin D, such as some cereals, juices, dairy products and egg yolks.

The skin can produce only a limited amount of vitamin D at one time. Once the body has reached this limit, spending more time in the sun will not continue to increase vitamin D levels. However, continued time in the sun will increase your skin cancer risk. There is no known level of UV exposure that would increase vitamin D levels without also increasing skin cancer risk. Vitamin D can be

obtained safely through food and dietary supplements without the risks associated with overexposure to UV.

And of course, as it relates to COVID-19, when you are outside, please remember to exercise social distance. If someone is walking toward you, stop and step aside if crossing over the pathway is not possible. Wear a mask when appropriate and remember a smile and wave can go a long way to making someone's day.

Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention