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Sunscreen vs. sunlight at altitude

Altitude increases the sunburn risk. Skiers, hikers and other people whose activities are in the mountains especially during the sunny snow season develop mild or moderate sun burn. UV intensities increase with altitude because objects are physically closer to sun. In general, intensity increases at a rate of 6% per 1000 feet above the sea level for the same altitude. At 5000 feet the sun is 30% stronger than at sea level. At 1000 ft. the sun's intensity increases by 60%, at a very high altitude, the sun's characteristics also change due to thinning of the atmosphere. Ultra violet light is made up of UVC, UVB and UVA; UVC being the shorter wavelength that is filtered out by the earth's ozone layer. UVA and UVB penetrate the ozone layer and reach the earth's surface but the atmosphere filters more UVA and UVB. Fortunately UVA is not so powerful in its effects with UVB on the skin. In a study published in the Academy of Dermatology, Rigel and his team reported similar results with ski instructors in Vail, who applied two different sunscreens – one with SPF 50 and other with SPF 85 to different sides of face. The sunscreen SPF 50 was not enough to protect them from sun burn.

Biography

Masroor Ahmad Wani is Gold Medalist, has done MD from Medical College, Kolkata. He is practicing Aesthetic and Skin Medicine at Health Zone Medicate, Srinagar, India. He has published many articles in newspapers and magazines, has attended more than 22 national and international dermatological conferences.

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