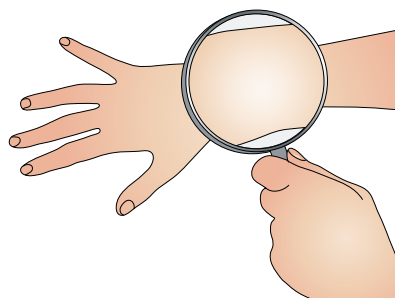


# Sun Protection

What you need to know to keep your skin healthy after an organ transplant



Did you know that your chances of developing skin cancer are higher if you have had an organ transplant? The good news is: there is a lot that you can do to prevent this and stay healthy. Making small changes in your daily routine right now will make a huge difference for your health in the long run! Learn more and start today!

Centre universitaire  
de santé McGill



McGill University  
Health Centre

Office d'éducation des patients  
Patient Education Office



Coolibar®  
Sun Protection You Wear

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## **Important: Please Read**

Information provided by this booklet is for educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice or instruction of a professional healthcare practitioner, or to substitute medical care. Contact a qualified healthcare practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.



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This material is also available through the  
MUHC Patient Education Office website  
[www.muhcpatienteducation.ca](http://www.muhcpatienteducation.ca)

# Sun protection after an organ transplant: why is this so important?

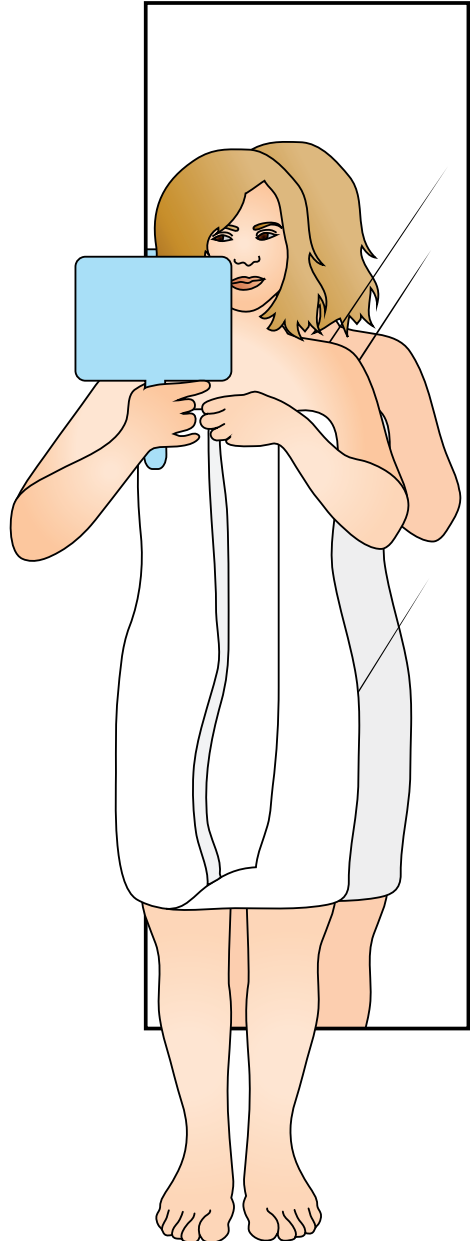
Congratulations on your new organ! We are very excited for your new life change!

You are now taking strong medications to keep your new organ healthy and working well. These medications, called immunosuppressants, keep your body from rejecting your organ.

At the same time, they make you more sensitive to the harmful effects of the sun. They do this by holding back your body's natural defense system to fight skin damage caused by sun rays. This means that your skin will change more quickly when exposed to the sun and these changes can lead to skin cancer.

In other words, your chances of developing skin cancer are higher now that you have had an organ transplant, compared to a person that does not have to take these medications.

But there is good news! You can change this! By learning some new habits and including them in your daily routine, you can prevent skin cancer and stay healthy.

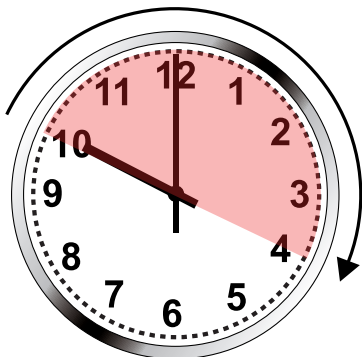


# What can I do?

Just a few, very key changes in your day can go a long way in preventing skin cancer. Here are some tips and strategies to help you protect yourself from the harmful effects of the sun:

## Plan ahead

- Between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM, limit the time you spend outdoors. Organize your schedule so that most of your outdoor activities are outside this time period. This applies all year round; summer, fall, winter and spring.

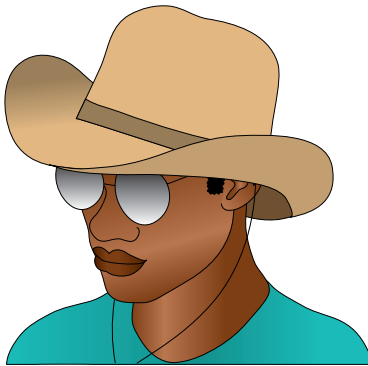


- Avoid direct sunlight as much as possible. If you are enjoying an outdoor picnic or on vacation, try to sit in the shade as much as you can.

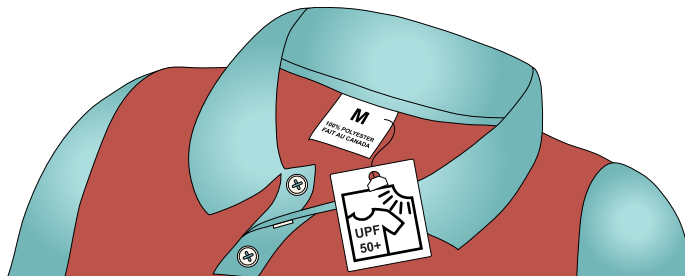


# Cover up

- Cover up your body as much as possible with clothing when you are outdoors. Wear a hat with a wide brim and sunglasses on a sunny day. Wear long-sleeved shirts or pants, and carry an umbrella to shield yourself from the sun.
- Wear dense and tight clothes that are not overstretched. Tightly woven clothes have less space between their yarns, which prevents harmful sunlight from passing through to your skin. Avoid thin clothing.
- Wear polyester clothing. This material is excellent for keeping out harmful rays.

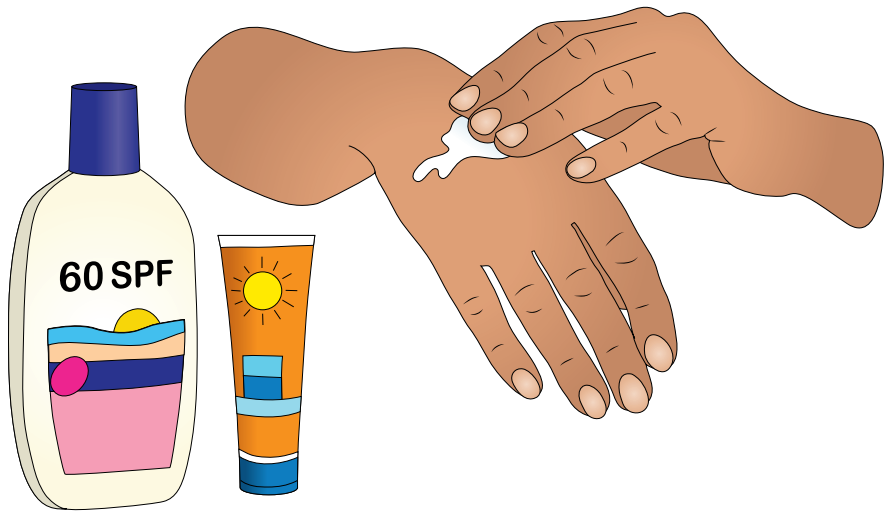


- Use UPF (Ultraviolet Protection Factor)-rated clothes. These clothes have a built-in protection from the sun and are great to wear if you are planning time outside (e.g. for a jog, a game of golf, or ski activity). You can find these clothes in sportswear stores or purchase them online.



# Wear sunscreen

- Wear sunscreen with an SPF (Sun Protection Factor) of at least 60. Use this every time you are planning to go outside during daytime hours (especially between 10:00AM and 4:00PM).
- Apply sunscreen 15 to 30 minutes before going outside. This will give your skin enough time to absorb it.
- Re-apply every 2 hours and after getting wet or sweating a lot. Use waterproof sunscreen if you will be swimming.
- Keep a sunscreen bottle with you or in your car at all times.
- Be generous with the amount of sunscreen you apply. Use an amount that covers well the entire area of your exposed skin with a thick layer of sun block.



**Did you know?** A thin coat of a sunscreen may only work at half its strength. So do not be shy to apply!

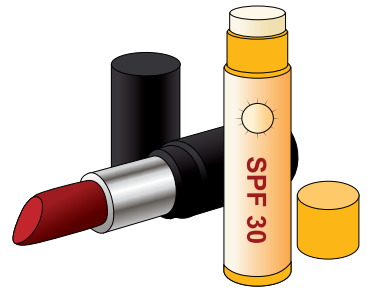
- Apply your sunscreen to all exposed areas of your body, especially your face, ears, behind the ears, the nose, the scalp (if you have little or no hair), the neck, the outer surfaces of the hands and arms and lower legs. These areas are the most prone to sun exposure.



**Did you know?** Sunlight can still have harmful effects on a cloudy or snow-filled day. Apply sunscreen all year round, regardless of the temperature or weather outside.

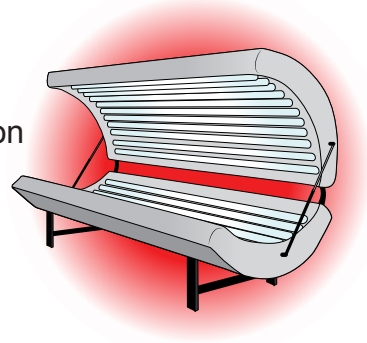
## Protect your lips

Wear SPF lip products for lip sun protection at all times. If you are a woman, your favourite lipstick color applied over SPF-protected lips will work just as well!



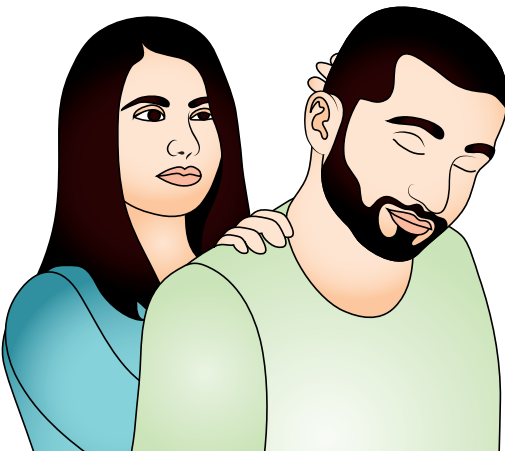
## Do not tan (this applies to both outdoor and tanning salons)

Avoid tanning. Do not use tanning oils or ultraviolet radiation tanning beds. They only make sun or ultraviolet rays more harmful!



## Check your skin regularly

Keep a close eye on any skin changes after your surgery. Ask a loved one to check areas that you cannot see (e.g. your back and the back of your neck.) If you notice any strange or sudden changes in size, shape and color, speak to your family doctor. He or she may refer you to a dermatologist.

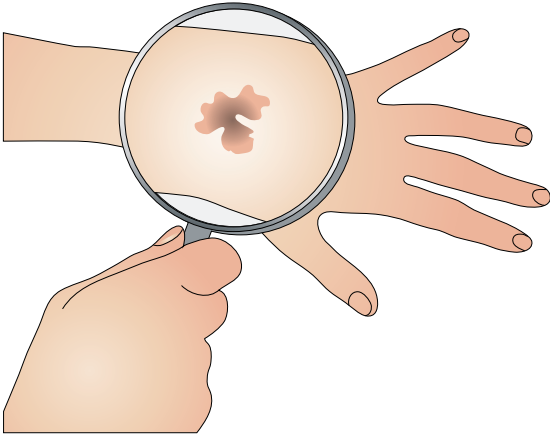


Want to learn more about how to perform a complete skin exam? Visit [muhcpatienteducation.ca](http://muhcpatienteducation.ca) and search: **Skin cancer warning signs**

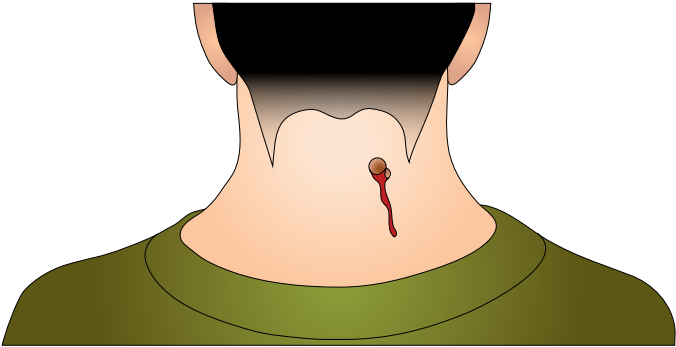


# Look out for the following:

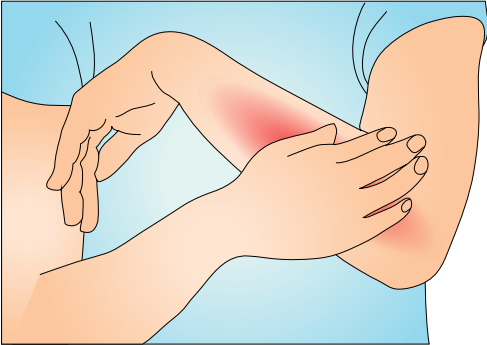
- changing or growing skin lesions



- bleeding



- Painful skin lesions



# Frequently Asked Questions

Using our experience and what transplant patients have asked us in the past, we have included some frequently asked questions for you. These questions have been answered by expert health professionals in our team:

**“Is it true that I will not cause damage to my skin as long as I avoid sunburns and I have a nice tanned look?”**

No, this is wrong. Research has shown that even small amounts of exposure to sunlight, from time to time, (even with no sunburn or redness), is as dangerous as actual sunburn. This is why you have to be very careful!

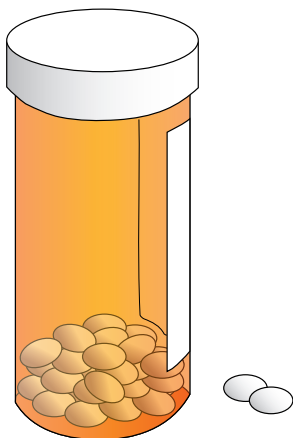
**“Does this mean that I only have to be careful during the summer time?”**

This is not true. No matter the temperature or weather outside, sunlight is harmful all year round. It doesn't have to be hot outside for skin damage to start occurring. The sun can be deceiving; it's harming your skin whether you are by the swimming pool in the summer or skiing in the winter!



**“Why should I be extra careful as a transplant patient?”**

Being a transplant patient, you are taking medications (**immunosuppressants**) that hold back your body's natural defense system to fight skin damage caused by sun rays. This causes more rapid skin changes, which can lead to skin cancer. For this reason, your chances of developing skin cancer are higher compared to a person that does not have to take these medications.





# Help Us Help Others

Help support the MUHC Patient Education Office! Donations make a huge difference. They help us create health information materials and programs to deliver the best care for life. All patient materials are freely available on the internet to MUHC patients, and to patients and families everywhere.

**Make a donation through the Montreal General Hospital Foundation to:**



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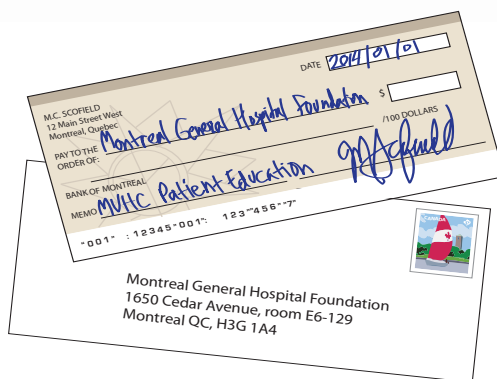
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