

Sun Protection

Q. The sun in Denver is especially dangerous because of the high altitude and my 13 year old son is quite fair skinned. I have strongly advised him to wear a hat while he plays in addition to putting on sunscreen. My son feels sunscreen is enough. Is there any scientific/medical literature that addresses this issue? It would seem that most of the sunscreen comes off by the second set. Any info on this would also be helpful.

A. Thank you for the question about the sun. As most people know, there is a direct link between sun exposure and developing skin cancer. So, taking steps to limit the body's exposure to the sun has the immediate benefit of preventing sun burn (which can make it very difficult to play tennis) and also has the long-term benefit of helping to prevent skin cancer.

The American Academy of Dermatology recommends that everyone use a broad-spectrum sunscreen having an SPF of at least 15, and advises consumers to check for ingredients that screen UVA: benzophenone, oxybenzone, sulisobenzene, titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, and butyl methoxydibenzoylmethane (also called avobenzone and known by the trade name Parsol 1789).

Tennis players should use sunscreens with higher SPFs, however, if possible. In general the sunscreen should be applied 15-30 minutes prior to the start of the match and should be reapplied according to the manufacturer's instructions.

One recommendation provided in a Tennis.com article is that an adult should apply 1 ounce of sunscreen every two hours when a person is sweating. As for hats, they can provide additional protection, but only to the areas they cover – so do not expect a baseball cap to protect the ears and back of the neck. The protection offered by a hat can also be extended to the eyes, as sun exposure increases your risk of getting cataracts.