

# 7 ways to stop a sunburn from itching

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**Use a moisturizer to rehydrate dried out, itchy sunburnt skin.**

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- As soon as you get in from the sun, you can use a cool compress to reduce inflammation.
- Taking a cold shower with oatmeal products can also soothe itching.
- You can also try applying aloe vera, which both heals sunburn and contains compounds that control itching.
- This article was medically reviewed by Debra Jaliman, MD, a board-certified dermatologist with a private practice in New York City.
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Spending too much time in the sun without protective clothing or sunscreen can lead to a red, prickling sunburn that leaves you scratching at your skin.

That itchiness is likely due to the fact that you've damaged the top layer of your skin, the epidermis, which contains many sensitive nerve endings.

A rare form of sunburn itch is hell's itch, also called "suicide itch", which is an unbearable case of itching. Hell's itch can be triggered by showers or lotions, so stay away from these if your skin feels like it's on fire.

But luckily, most cases of itchy sunburn are not as severe as hell's itch and can be treated with a few simple remedies. Here are 7 easy ways to get relief from sunburn itch.

## 1. Use a cool compress

As with any burn, it is helpful to cool down sunburned skin as soon as possible to help reduce inflammation. Itching usually sets in between one and three days after you've been burnt, so treating it early could help keep inflammation symptoms like itching at bay.

You can make a cool compress by putting a few ice cubes in a plastic bag, wrapping it in a soft cloth, and holding it to the sunburned area.

Make sure to avoid putting ice directly on your skin. Because if the skin becomes too cold, it can actually freeze the water in your skin, forming small crystals that can cut into nearby skin cells, causing more pain and damage.

## 2. Take a cool shower

You can also take a cool shower or bath to cool down your skin, but make sure not to stay in the water for too long, as this can dry it out. This is because the water can remove the protective oils on your skin's surface that help to trap moisture.

In the shower, be sure to avoid harsh, oil-stripping soaps, as these can cause more skin irritation. Instead, try shower products made with oatmeal, which can help soothe itching.

## 3. Use moisturizer

One important step to soothing sunburned, itchy skin is to keep it moisturized since dry skin can increase itchiness. Moisturizer even "brings down inflammation and helps skin repair" says **Gary Goldenberg, MD**, a New York City-based dermatologist. Make certain to use a fragrance free moisturizer.

The best time to use moisturizer is right after showering or bathing, while your skin is still damp and pores are open, so you can lock in moisture.

Gentle moisturizers like Cetaphil or CeraVe are good options for sunburn treatment, says Goldberg.

Be sure to stay away from numbing products with benzocaine like Orajel, as this can irritate your skin, making pain and itching worse.

## 4. Use Aloe Vera

Aloe vera is a potent moisturizer and anti-inflammatory treatment. The gel also contains magnesium lactate, which prevents the production of histamines that can lead to itchy skin.

In addition, aloe has been shown to help treat sunburn by soothing hot skin, stimulating collagen production, and giving your body the vitamins it needs to heal.

The best way to apply aloe is to squeeze the gel straight from the plant and rub it on your sunburn. But if you don't have access to an aloe plant, look for a bottle that is as close to 100% aloe vera as possible.

## **5. Apply steroid cream**

If moisturizers aren't providing enough relief for your sunburn symptoms, you may want to try using an over-the-counter steroid cream with 1 percent cortisone.

Cortisone cream improves inflammation symptoms like itching, redness, and swelling by blocking the chemicals that trigger your immune system's inflammatory response.

Experts advise that you should not use cortisone cream for more than a week without talking to a doctor, and pregnant women and children under 10 should avoid it altogether.

## **6. Take anti-inflammatory medications**

Another way to reduce inflammatory sunburn symptoms like pain and itching is to take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

NSAID medications like ibuprofen (Advil), naproxen (Aleve), and aspirin relieve pain and have been shown to reduce the inflammation that causes itching in sunburned skin.

Another way to calm your symptoms is to take antihistamines, which reduce itching by blocking the release of chemicals that increase your immune system's inflammatory response.

## **7. Protect your skin from the sun**

Lastly, while you are healing from painful, itchy sunburn, one of the most important steps you can take is to stay out of the sun and avoid further damage, Goldberg says. Particularly during peak sun hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

If you do go outside, wear clothes that cover your skin and are tightly woven, so that nothing shines through when you hold them up to a light. Unbleached cotton is a good option, as well as shiny fabrics that reflect light like polyester or satin.

Itchy sunburns can often be treated at home, but if severe itching disrupts your sleep or daily activities for more than two days, call your doctor since you may have a more serious condition of sun poisoning.