



Northern Lincolnshire
Area Prescribing Committee

>>>>>> July 2013

## Introduction

July is here and we are half way through the year already. The Area Prescribing Committee for Northern Lincolnshire has added even more items to the prescribing Formulary so that patients of this region have increased access to potentially lifesaving treatments. The population of this area continues to have an excellent standard of care. We are a committee with the core value to promote effective prescribing and support medicine applications from clinicians at the forefront of their speciality. We strive to make the Northern Lincolnshire region a highly regarded area and we interlace the best interests of all patients into everything we do.

## Here Comes the Sun!

We are now deep into the summer months and the weather begins to get hotter. The sunshine is something that many of us look forward to. Many people like to get a suntan and wear clothes that do not cover the arms and legs. This sounds idyllic to most sun lovers, however there are some very important precautionary measures that you must take when exposed to elevated levels of sunlight.

The sun is natural, yes, but that does not mean that prolonged exposure is safe. Even if you are using a high factor sun-cream and are regularly applying it as per the manufacturer's guidelines, you are still at risk if you stay in the sun too long. Suncreams and lotions offer protection to the harmful elements of sunlight. They do not block the sun's rays completely. If you feel that your skin is burning, cover up with a light layer of clothing as well as applying sun-creams. You may need to get out of the sun altogether.

There are many sun-creams available. Within each sun-cream range there are many different sun protection factor (SPF) numbers. Generally, the higher numbers offer an increased protection. We always recommend erring on the side of caution and using a high factor sun-cream. This is especially important when your skin is being exposed to sun before it has had chance to begin to tan. However, a sun lotion of medium to high protection is recommended whenever you are exposed to the sun for longer than a few moments at a time.

A common misconception is that after-sun is part of the protection treatment. This is not the case. Most after-sun lotions, creams and gels contain moisturising agents and soothing ingredients. These are to only be applied overnight when there is no

exposure to the sun. If these were to be applied when you are in the sun, some may have the opposite effect of a sun-cream and actually amplify the sun's rays causing you to burn. Always wash off after-sun before being exposed to sunlight and reapply a sun-cream as necessary.

The SPF of your sun-cream is very important. This tends to denote how much the cream will act as a protective barrier from the suns potentially harmful UVB rays. UVB rays are the part of the sunlight spectrum of energy that leads to sunburn. Therefore if you do not want to burn, use a sun-cream with a factor of 30 to 50. For those of you who have developed a tan and have carefully applied a factor 30 to 50 cream for several days of exposure, you may consider using a cream as low as 20. Never have prolonged exposure to the sun without using a cream or clothes as a protective layer. Even for those whose skin has adapted to the sunlight, we would not usually recommend any sun-cream or lotion with an SPF of less than 20.

UVA rays from the sun do not directly burn the skin to the extent that UVB rays do. Therefore, the damage from these UVA rays is not as immediately obvious. However, it is accepted that UVA rays are a factor that leads to many types of skin cancer including malignant melanoma. You must ensure that any products that you use protect against UVA rays from the sun. The star rating on the back of your suncream denotes how much the manufacturers intend their product to protect from these harmful elements of sun radiation. The star rating is from one to five. We only recommend that you use a product with a five star UVA protection rating.

Sun products are available in many forms including creams, lotions, gels and sprays. None are necessarily better than the other, but the SPF and UVA star ratings tend to be the most important factors. Always reapply the sun products regularly and follow the manufacturer's guidance. Ask a suitably qualified professional for advice if you are unsure. The benefit with sprays is that they offer access to parts of the body that may be difficult to apply a cream to. However, a cream may be a more suitable option for those areas where you can constantly reapply the product, such as the tops of shoulders and facial area. If you swim or take a midday shower, remember to reapply the sun-cream. Even those that are marketed as water resistant can lose a significant amount of their protecting properties after swimming and showering. Always keep sensible and safe in the sun and ask a healthcare professional for advice.

A list of newly available treatment options will be published in the August Newsletter. Keep a look out for this important information. In the meantime, enjoy the sun and keep safe.

## www.NorthernLincolnshireAPC.nhs.uk