

## How to Look Like a Vampire, Have Fun in the Sun, and Still Beat Cancer

by Stride Longley

Believe it or not, the perpetual pasty whiteness of the skin on my legs, arms, and face is neither fashion statement nor political statement. Mostly, it's a curse bestowed upon me by some stroke of genealogical misfortune. Worse yet, the blinding glow of my deathly pallor necessitates more pampering than Tom Brady's knee during preseason. If left unprotected in the sun, my skin burns with such rapidity one might mistake me for homage to tacky B-grade vampire movies circa the mid 50s. Yeah, it's that bad. Sadly, I'm not the only person with this problem, and the real kicker is sunburn is really only the beginning.

If, like me, you're one of the unlucky masses who suffers with skin of the fairer sort, chances are good you've seen the numbers and made the right decisions to make sure you don't become one. But for the uninitiated: Sun exposure is the leading cause of skin cancer, a frighteningly generic term covering a group of conditions ranging from basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma to name the more common varieties. Each year over 1,000,000 new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed in the U.S. alone, and some 9,000 Americans die from it. As if our chances weren't bad enough, it's estimated that 1 in 5 Americans will develop a form of skin cancer within their lifetime, and that 90% of non-melanoma skin cancers can be in part attributed to exposure to the Sun's ultraviolet radiation (UV). If you're reading this article outside, I need not suggest finding a good patch of shade.

Enough with the scary numbers. The fact of the matter is, whether or not you think you're at risk for it, the odds aren't very much in your favor. Even if you had money on Mine That Bird, I wouldn't bank too heavily on luck paying dividends in the cancer department.

So as avid outdoorsmen and women, how are we to combat the evils of UV exposure short of tucking our tails and finding a nice air conditioned treadmill 365 days a year? For me, half the fun of running is showing off my shiny new shoes (which woefully never stay that way) to the passersby, and I'm certainly not sacrificing my one pleasure because of the fully rational fear of cancer. The answer, luckily, is probably in your closet already.

In recent years, many apparel manufacturers have silently begun incorporating UPF fabrics in their garments to help protect their valued consumers and keep them alive long enough to buy more gear. UPF, simply put, is a number which represents the amount of ultraviolet light which can penetrate a particular garment; for example, UPF 50 would mean that all but 1/50<sup>th</sup> of UV rays (both UV-A and B) are blocked by the fabric, meaning the wearer is around 98% protected.

Because of the recent prevalence of media coverage on the topic of skin cancers (May is skin cancer awareness month, after all), a great many of these apparel manufacturers are taking the opportunity to highlight the performance of their garments on the hang tags. Next time you make an addition to your wardrobe, pay particular attention to garments with special UPF stickers or tags. You might be surprised. If info isn't available on the garment, chances are good it's on their website, so it may not hurt to do a little digital sleuthing either.

If you're not sure whether a garment will have protective properties, you can judge for yourself based on a few factors:

- 1) Weave: The tighter the weave, the greater the protection. Very loose, gossamer like weaves will allow a great deal of light through, so hold your garment up to the light to see for yourself.
- 2) Color: Darker colors are better at absorbing light, and while wearing a black shirt on a hot summer day may be counterintuitive, you will be affording yourself better protection.
- 3) Weight: The heavier the garment, the better. Obviously you need to decide for yourself whether the thermal properties of a garment or its UPF capabilities are the more beneficial.
- 4) Stretch: Similar to a garment's weave, the less stretchy a garment is the more protective it will be.

Chances are good, whether you know it or not, you've got a few options in your closet that will keep you both cool and protected during the summer months ahead, but keep your eyes peeled next time you visit your local running shop for gear touting its UPF effectiveness. Don't forget hats and visors either.

One last thing: never one to ignore the obvious, I feel it's also important to clarify that one of the first lines of defense to combat UV exposure is a good sunscreen. Based on the fairness of your skin, the activities you'll be taking part in, and the duration you'll be exposed to the sun, make an informed decision as to the SPF of your sunscreen (SPF is a number which represents, of all things, how much longer it will take your skin to burn after being applied; SPF 15 means it takes skin 15 times longer to burn than when unprotected, and is a good choice for many people or for shorter periods of activity).

For marathoners and endurance athletes or those of the fairest complexion, lower SPF sunscreens may not be enough, and SPF 45 or higher may be an appropriate choice. And remember, waterproof sunscreen is crucial; sweat has a tendency to dilute or completely ruin the effectiveness of some sunscreens, so pay particular attention to how well a certain product handles the rigors of activity.

If you play your cards right, you too can avoid cancer and still show off your new shoes to the masses, without wearing a Snuggie (As-Seen-On-TV) and tophat combo that's sure to never be acceptable fashion accoutrement.

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