

# Heliotherapy: cosmic Healing Sunlight



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by Ken Rosen, M.S. L.Ac.

**Papa Yang. Father Sky.** Great ball of fire. Supreme Oxidizer. Our day time star: the Sun.

Other than those who live in regions blessed by an all-year-round sunshine, sunbathing may be considered a luxury, a rare comfort to be sought after, and perhaps even almost a sin. They spend a lot of time and money to be in the light of the sun. Perhaps many do it to get that glorious tan, paying little heed to its therapeutic benefits.

Heliotherapy, light therapy, or just plain sunbathing is more than a luxury, more than just a pleasure-seeking pursuit that returns a look that stands out amidst pale complexion. It is an essential means of cultivating mind and body wellness.

The sun is the source behind all life's processes on the planet. How could our collective and individual well-being not be tied to the light given off by the sun?

The sun is the very heart of creation and our constant measure of time. Each second, the sun transforms four million tons of itself into radiant light energy; very much like a benevolent giver giving up of itself unconditionally so others could enjoy. As Brian Swimme writes in *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*: "If the sun were to suddenly stop transforming itself into energy, all plants would die as earth's temperature plummeted hundreds of degrees below zero."

## History

Light therapy was first recorded by history in ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, and Babylon. Helios is the Greek word for sun. In these ancient cultures, sun gardens were places of healing and the sun was attributed the power of a God. Hippocrates, "the father of western medicine", used heliotherapy for both physical and psychological problems.

As man began to take their conomic activities indoors following the Industrial Revolution,

sunlight as a healing therapy became less valued. In the early twentieth century a small number of doctors used heliotherapy to treat patients with tuberculosis, smallpox, rickets in children, and also to heal war wounds. Dr. Niels Finsen went on to win the Nobel prize in 1903 for his use of UV light in the treatment of tuberculosis.

Fear of skin cancer and ageing the skin quickly replaced some healthy time in the sun. We started lathering ourselves up with chemical sunscreens to avoid sun damage, but still felt the need to soak up light energy.

Today, heliotherapy is considered a placebo in most conventional medical circles. Compounding this is the constant barrage of reports about the dangers of widening ozone hole in the stratosphere.

Big news happened in 2002 when scientists in Boston showed that small amounts of sunshine can greatly reduce the risk of breast, colon, and prostate cancers. Now it is confirmed that sunlight, mostly feared for its risk of skin cancer, could in moderate amounts prevent many serious cancers.

## What happens

Sunlight oxidizes your skin. In others words, you rust. Too much oxidation, your skin burns red, the oxidized skin peels off as dead layer and later replaces itself. Used sparingly and gradually sunlight helps your skin to glow with health.


The light travelling from the sun affects the bio-chemistry of the skin, namely in the synthesis of Vitamin D. Vitamin D plays an important role in calcium metabolism in your body which relates to your bones, the densest, innermost part of yourself. Interestingly, this interplay is echoed in yin/yang theory of Traditional Chinese Medicine. A vitamin that is synthesized on your skin, the outermost area of you (yang) affects the mineral metabolism that makes up the innermost portion of you (yin), in this case the bones.

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin so it can be stored for use during sun-deficient periods. Vitamin D is not only important in calcium metabolism, but also plays an important role in checking infectious diseases and immune related disorders such as cancer, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and diabetes. While Vitamin D is present in small amounts in some foods, casual sun exposure for a short amount of time will easily meet Vitamin D needs. Vitamin D sourced only from food or supplement sources can turn toxic in the body. Sun-derived vitamin D does not become toxic because of our body's self-regulatory mechanisms. The 2002 Boston study mentioned above also concluded that 45-50% of populations living in cities in Northern Latitudes are Vitamin D-deficient.

Of course, healing sunlight does much more than just synthesizing a specific vitamin in the body. We may not be able to name everything that sunlight does for our wellness. Among others, it has been found that people that practise sunbathing have dramatically lowered blood pressure, regulated blood sugar, lowered cholesterol, and increased white blood cell count.

Specifically, heliotherapy has been clinically shown to be useful in treating tuberculosis, psoriasis, and healing wounds, acne, and seasonal affective disorder (SAD). In one recent study, spinal-surgery patients assigned to bright, sunny rooms needed substantially less pain medication during healing time.

The warm, nourishing feeling that we get from sunbathing may never be fully embraced by the medical establishment. Yet, we still like to take time out in the sun while on holiday or ducking outdoors at lunch to soak up some healing light. So, enjoy the healing power of the sun, but also have a healthy respect for its strength. [sa](#)



Some Interesting quotes about the **Sun**

“Sunlight is like a good champagne. It invigorates and stimulates; indulged in excess, it intoxicates and poisons.”

Sir Henry Gauvain, Britain's leading heliotherapist, 1922

“That orb'd continent, the fire that severs day from night.”

Shakespeare

“All matter is frozen light.”

Physicist David Bohm

## Practical **Sun** Therapy

“The names of the (summer) periods Summer Solstice, Slighthet, Great Heat show an emphasis on the yang power. The heat here is that of the air, different from that of the body. While Spring warmed, as it were, from below, causing shoots to emerge, summer crushes everything under Heaven with the enormous weight of heat.”

from *The Way of Heaven: Neijing suwen* Chapters 1 & 2 translated by Claude Larre (Monkey Press p.30)

- Always have respect for the power of the sun.
- Don't try to jam all your sunbathing into a short amount of time, i.e. time away on holiday.
- Frequent short exposures are better than prolonged exposure. Start with only a few minutes, then gradually build your tolerance.
- Expose your hands and feet first before exposing more sensitive parts of your body.
- The most beneficial time of the year to expose yourself to the sun is in spring and early summer. Early morning the sun is also at its most beneficial and harmless.
- All heliotherapy proponents advocate focusing your diet on whole foods. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables while avoiding large amounts of refined food.
- The body does need to receive the full spectrum of sunlight to synthesize vitamin D, so do not overly cover yourself with sunscreen. Avoid using sunscreens on large areas of the body and for prolonged periods in the sun. Consider using natural substances that have sun protection factor like olive oil, sesame oil, and aloe vera instead of chemical substances like sunscreen, which blocks vitamin D synthesis by up to 95%.
- Do not use soap for at least 20-30 minutes after sun exposure. It takes your body time to take in the light and synthesize Vitamin D.
- **COVER UP!** Use sunscreen shirts, fabrics and hats to help protect you from the full power of the sun.
- Stay alert so that you do not burn yourself.