



## healthywoman FROM BOTTOM LINE

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# Skim Milk Compress Soothes Sunburned Skin

Though my fair-haired husband is susceptible to sunburn, he is not as careful about using sunscreen as he should be. So I was not surprised when, after a recent trip to the beach, he complained about having some patches of painfully pink skin. But he *was* surprised when I told him that the remedy was in our refrigerator.

I learned about this simple solution—a skim milk compress—from Neal B. Schultz, MD, an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine and owner of Park Avenue Skin Care, both in New York City. This homemade compress not only soothes sunburn pain, but also promotes healing.

***How does it work?*** Normally, the skin's pH (a measure of acidity or alkalinity) is on the acidic side. But sunburn causes inflammation, which throws the pH off kilter and makes skin more alkaline. The protein in the milk acts as a chemical buffer that helps reduce painful inflammation and restore the skin's proper pH, Dr. Schultz explained. In addition, as the milk evaporates from the skin, it causes cooling, which makes dilated blood vessels contract, thereby further reducing inflammation. Plain water also could achieve this second healing effect, but not the first.

Why *skim* milk instead of whole? Because skim milk has a higher ratio of protein to fat, and it is the protein that helps the healing process—the extra fat would just make the compress messier. (Dr. Schultz pointed out that this remedy also helps relieve skin inflammation and irritation from other causes, such as poison ivy.)

***To make the compress:*** In a bowl, mix equal amounts of skim milk and slightly warm water to create a room-temperature mixture. As Dr. Schultz explained, a cold compress might feel more soothing initially, but the liquid would not evaporate as quickly, so you wouldn't get as much anti-inflammatory action... and undiluted milk could create more mess without increasing the effectiveness. Dip a smooth cloth, such as a handkerchief or T-shirt (a washcloth's rough texture would be too irritating), into the milk mixture. Then wring it out a bit—you want the cloth to be sufficiently damp but not dripping—and place the compress on the sunburned area for five minutes or so. There is no need to rinse your skin afterward. Repeat every three to four hours, continuing for as long as needed.

**Source:** Neal B. Schultz, MD, is an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine and owner of Park Avenue Skin Care, both in New York City. He also is the founder of [www.DermTV.com](http://www.DermTV.com) and author of *It's Not Just About Wrinkles* (Stewart, Tabori and Chang). [www.NealSchultzMD.com](http://www.NealSchultzMD.com)