

# Take cover

Don't forget your umbrella especially when going outdoors on a sunny day, experts tell **Karen Teng**

THE next time you see female colleagues bringing along umbrellas for the walk to the coffee shop across the road from the office, don't snigger and dismiss it as "auntie" behaviour.

There is nothing 'uncool' about the habit as excessive constant exposure to the sun is harmful, say the experts.

Umbrellas with reflective colours or impregnated with a layer of UV blockers are pretty useful as they reflect out the sunrays.

— Dr Joyce Lim, dermatologist, Paragon Medical Centre

Sunrays emit ultraviolet radiation in the UVA and UVB bands.

"Both these rays have damaging effects on the skin and hair. UVB rays can cause a sunburn whereas UVA rays can cause skin ageing, skin pigmentation and skin cancers. The UVA rays penetrate deeper into the skin and therefore causes more damage," says dermatologist Dr Joyce Lim, who has her own practice at the Paragon Medical Centre.

Long-term cumulative exposure will take a toll on one's looks.

Dr Wong Su-Ni, a dermatologist at the Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre, warns: "The skin will age faster, with wrinkles and pigmentation problems

starting from an earlier age.

"Excessive constant sun exposure may cause hair colour to fade and hair to become dry, brittle or frizzy.

"In people with balding or hair thinning at the crown, sun burn of the scalp, skin cancers or pre-malignant skin growths may develop."

Protect your skin by using sunscreen cream, and if you're heading out for lunch, choose covered walkways and underground passages.

"Walk in the shade where possible. When there is no shade, create your own with an umbrella," advises Dr Wong. "It's not uncool."

Umbrellas now come with UV blocking features.

Says Dr Lim: "Umbrellas

with reflective colours or impregnated with a layer of UV blockers are pretty useful as they reflect out the sunrays."

"Tight weave, darker colours and synthetic cloth compared to cotton, will offer a high protection factor," adds Dr Wong.

Heeding the experts' advice seriously is graphic designer Florence Wong, who's in her 40s. She bought an UV-blocker umbrella from a department store and keeps it in her bag at all times.

She says: "The sales assistant recommended it to me. It cost about 10 dollars more than a normal umbrella but I'm okay with that.

"I use it whenever I have to go out in the sun so that I don't get dark spots."

## Handle with care

Be prepared to pay a few dollars more for an umbrella with UV-blocking features as its price depends on how good the coating is.

Such umbrellas are usually marked to highlight the additional feature but if a tag is not available, take a closer look at the fabric.

A UV-blocker umbrella comes with dual colour tones, says Mr Kenny Goh, sales manager of Ming Kee Umbrella, which has been in business for over four decades.

"The UV feature is a coating in a colour such as silver and it is applied to the umbrella fabric such as polyester or nylon," he says.

To maintain its effectiveness, do handle the umbrella with care, he adds.

"Before opening your umbrella, shake it a bit to free the umbrella ribs. If it's wet, leave it open to dry before storing.

"And try to carry your umbrella facing the wind direction to avoid damage to the frame by a strong gust of wind."

Ming Kee umbrellas with UV protection are available at Watsons, Cheers, 7-Eleven, Guardian, Cold Storage and Metro stores.

