

# SUN SURFING

Scientists warn avoiding sunlight entirely may harm long-term health despite dangers from extreme heat

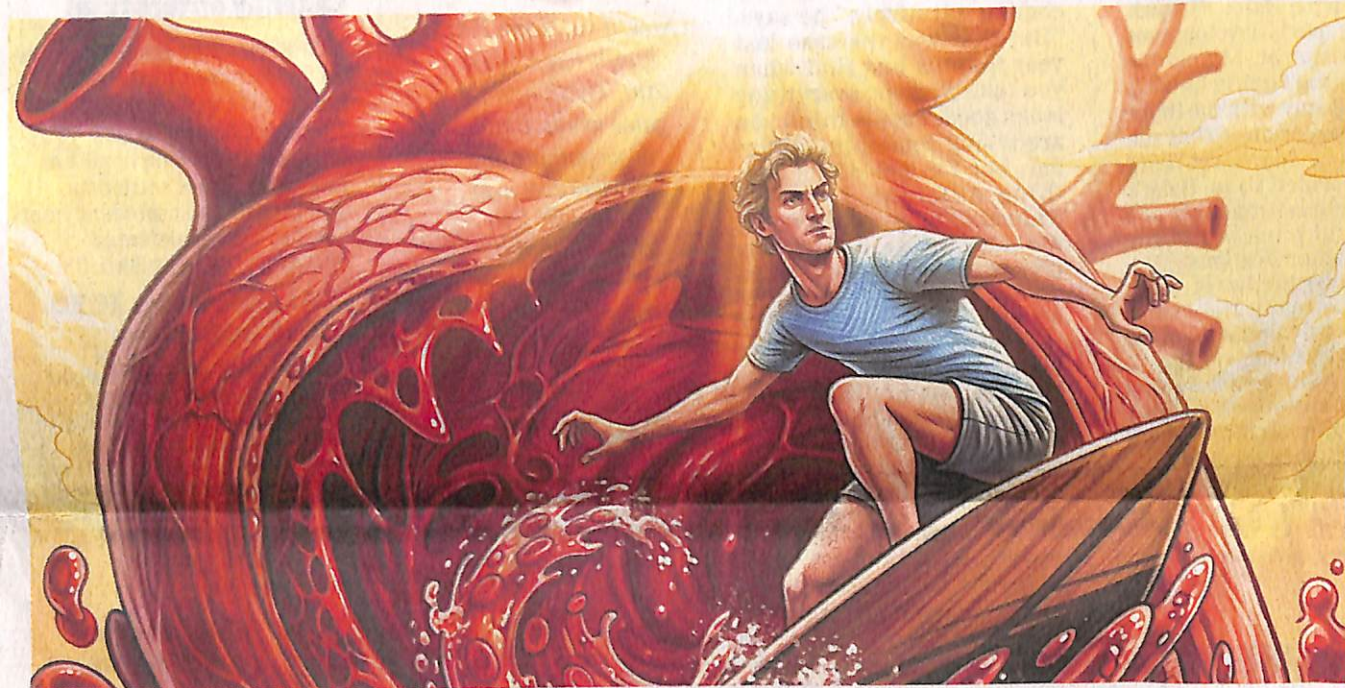
## WHAT RESEARCHERS EMPHASISE

- Heat and sunlight are not the same thing
- Scientists are not advising people to stand outside during peak heat
- The debate is about balanced, sensible

- sunlight exposure – not extreme heat exposure
- Researchers argue modern indoor lifestyles may be reducing healthy sunlight exposure too drastically

## BENEFITS OF SUNLIGHT EXPOSURE

- May lower risk of heart disease
- Helps regulate blood pressure through nitric oxide release
- Linked to a lower risk of type 2 diabetes
- Supports immune function
- Helps regulate sleep cycles and hormones
- Associated with improved metabolic health
- Natural source of Vitamin D
- Dangers of extreme heat exposure



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**T**HE sun has become something to fear. Across India's cities, people now move through summer like survivors crossing hostile land, wrapping scarves across faces and rushing between patches of shade as temperatures climb beyond 45°C. This summer, people have fainted in the heat and hospitals have reported deaths caused by heatstroke. The message arriving from television screens, weather alerts and anxious families is relentless: stay away from the sun. And honestly, we have to be terrified. The heat is real. It can kill.

But somewhere inside laboratories, medical journals and long-running scientific debates, researchers are now asking a question that sounds almost dangerous in a country battling deadly heatwaves: what if completely avoiding sunlight is harming us too?

*The New Indian Express* came across one such major review titled Beneficial health effects of ultraviolet radiation: expert review and conference report. Published in the peer-reviewed journal *Photochemical & Photobiological Sciences* in 2025, the review was led by researchers including Professor Richard B. Weller from the University of Edin-

burgh. The review argues that sunlight may be doing far more for the human body than scientists once believed — not just for Vitamin D or bones, but also in lowering risks of heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Researchers say public health conversations may have become so focused on the dangers of sunlight that they are overlooking its biological benefits. Over the past several years, studies across cardiology, endocrinology and public health research have increasingly linked sensible sunlight exposure with improved cardiovascular health, metabolic regulation and immune function. "But that does not mean people should walk into deadly afternoon heat," Weller told *TNIE*.

"We have to understand the difference. Heat is dangerous and heatwaves can cause deaths in the short term. But the benefits of sunlight are different and are long-term effects on health. In simple terms, heat and sunlight are not the same thing."

Now imagine a young techie in Hyderabad. He leaves for work after sunset and returns home just before sunrise. Curtains stay shut against the blazing heat outside as he sleeps through the day in an air-conditioned

room. By evening, he is back under tube lights and the cold blue glare of computer screens at 2 am.

Entire weeks pass without sunlight touching his face. Across Telangana and Maharashtra, thousands now live almost like nocturnal creatures, hiding from daylight so completely that the body may slowly be forgetting what sunlight even feels like.

Scientists say the problem is that modern conversations increasingly treat all sun exposure as equally bad. They argue that this may be too simplistic, especially in a country like India, where sunlight shaped human biology for thousands of years.

To explain why sunlight affects the body so deeply, Weller says we have to travel back tens of thousands of years, all the way to Africa. "Humans arose in Africa in a very sunny place. Your ancestors and my ancestors left Africa about 60,000 years ago. Yours turned right and mine turned left."

In places with weaker sunlight, such as northern Europe, people gradually developed paler skin to absorb more ul-

## HEATSTROKE CAN BE FATAL

Heatstroke can cause dehydration, exhaustion, fainting and organ failure, while worsening heart and respiratory illnesses. Hospitals across India have reported deaths during extreme heatwaves

