Get Over It

Free advice and a shot of attitude for sun- and sleep-seekers

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Dear Nurse Know-It-All:
Dermatologists be damned! I'm crazy about sunbathing. I know, I know—it's bad for bods with the bug. But I feel so healthy and alluring with a tan. Come on now, can't an HIVer spend a day at the beach without wrapping up like a mummy?
—Luscious Leatherette

Dear Leatherette:
First of all, don't disparage dermatologists—I have my eye on an absolutely divine one. Believe me, once I get under his skin with my bedside manner, I plan many a consensual consultation. But the sun's the thing, and you want Nursie to shed some light on UV exposure. So here it is—but you won't be pleased: It turns on HIV! Yes, the bloody virus loves the sun, too! (Or at least it grows like crazy when ultraviolet light hits the test tube.)

As I cook up this column, there's no hard data showing that sunning itself boosts your viral load. But good lord, use your noodle! HIV or not, melanoma is nothing to sizzle for. So apply common sense—and sunscreen. Minimally, use lotions with SPF 15; to avoid the look of luggage in later life, go for 30 or even 45. And if you don't stay away from the rays between the peak hours of radiation—10 a.m. to 3 p.m.—it's burn, baby, burn.

Believe it or not, even the Food and Drug Administration has a comment on AIDSy tanning: Through some miracle of chemistry, positives tend toward photosensitivity, and thus may experience severe Solarcaine-screaming burns. And some of the drugs you take can make it worse, particularly Bactrim and other sulfa-based antibiotics, not to mention the lovely sleeping pill Ambien and that must-have of postmodern living, the antidepressant Zoloft. Be safe, sweeties: Ask your doc if the pills you're taking will barbecue you on the beach.

If you do get burned, do what the neggies do: Pop an aspirin, down (filtered) water, slather on vitamin E oil, aloe gel and mentholated creams like Noxzema, which take the sting out. If you're extra-burnt toast, see a doctor—fast.

P.S. Beware tanning booths—they can inflict the same blistering damage as Mr. Sun himself.

Hey, Know-It-All:
I work like a dog and can't wait to hit the sack. But once I get into my baby-doll, switch off the light, say my prayers and rest my head on the pillow, my mind's in overdrive. After counting more sheep than ex-lovers, I'm still wide awake. And when I finally fall asleep, I wake up after a couple hours—groggy and cranky. Help me get some shut-eye before I become a nut case.
—Bags for Days

Dear Bags:
Nurse has a confession: Sleeping like a baby every night, I envy insomniacs. I think of all the things I could do during the wee hours that I never have time to bother with—labeling photos from vacations of years past, organizing old bills chronologically, sending birthday cards a month early, polishing the silver. But the truth is, life offers few pleasures better than a good night's sleep, so let me try to help you to reach your REM deep sleep.

Your problem may stem from HIV itself, the chemo you're taking to kill it or other meds to treat mundane complaints—diuretics, antihistamines and decongestants. Regardless, the first thing to check is your bedroom. Is there too much noise? Too much light? Do an Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and don a sleep mask and foam ear plugs. Does your bedroom double as an office? Bad idea.

Now, what about your nocturnal routine? Go to bed at about the same time each night, and see if dreams don't start drifting your way. Avoid late-night exertion—work, workouts, etc.—though Nurse would never advise cutting down on nookie. But before that, try curling up with a Victorian novel, tuning in to Gregorian chants or indulging in a *little* meditation. And, as much as I hate to say it, avoid nightcaps. Even a *soupcon* of sauce before slumber stimulates the kind of chemical activity in the brain that is bound to bar you from beauty sleep. And while we're talking about a few of Nursie's favorite things, eschew espresso after sundown—unless, after all, you do want to label those old vacation photos.

Still up? Proceed to Plan B, and take the pill route. To see Mr. Sandman fast (but with their own possible side effects including morning-after fog), your doctor can prescribe antidepressant sedatives like trazaodone (Desyrel), doxepin (Adapin) and the aforementioned Ambien, which works like a charm—when it works. Or head for the nearest health food store for some Valerian root or melatonin, a hormone the body itself makes to induce sleep.

This column offers self-help for nagging health problems. Send your own complaints to Nurse Know-It-All at 349 W. 12th St., New York, NY 10014, or e-mail at nurse@poz.com. Experts supply the answers, Greg Lugliani the attitude.

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