HERE COMES THE SUN

writer LAIA FARRAN GRAVES | photographer CATHARINE NICOL

Without the sun there would be no life on earth...

For a start, our planet would be frozen. The sun also gives us the all-essential light, heat and energy we need to live. Without the sun plants would not exist. Without plants, which make food out of sunlight, animals would have nothing to eat and neither would we. Without the sun plants couldn't produce oxygen. The sun is also responsible for creating gravity, keeping us on Earth, and keeping Earth in its place in the universe. Weather, wind, tides... and clouds, which produce rain – all exist thanks to the sun.

The Sun is a star with a diameter of 1,390,000 km. It is at the centre of the solar system about 150 million kilometers away from planet Earth.

But while the sun endows life on earth with its heat, light and energy, its rays also create problems. As the Earth's ozone layer has deteriorated, we are becoming more and more aware of the evidence of damage to the planet and to our skin – and everyone are on the rise.

Our skin tone has evolved. It is trying to block the UV rays and prevent further injury to its cells. As the ozone layer is depleted – the ozone layer is responsible for filtering UVB rays, the type of ultraviolet light which is the main cause of sunburn and skin cancer – more UVB penetrates the atmosphere, leading to more exposure of our skin to this type of radiation. But the fashion of tanning began long before we were aware of all this...

the glamour of tanning

When Coco Chanel returned from a vacation in the 1920s with a dark deep tan, the fashion industry was taken by storm, and there was no going back. She began to use dark models for her players and designs, and the trend grew more stronger and more chic. Prior to this time, white skin was the mark of high fashion and an all status, as it was synonymous with not having to labour outdoors in the sun. But as time went by, the tanning fashion grew – think Brigitte Bardot – and sun-kissed skin was now seen to be sexy and healthy.

At this time there was no evidence that the sun could damage our skin, so there were no guidelines or prevention. Sunscreen, once designed to cover the skin, has now smaller and smaller.

In the 1950s the first self-tanning product emerged, and as package holidays became available to a mass audience in the 1960s and 1970s, the effects of sunburn were finally brought to our attention. But it wasn't until the late 1970s and 1980s that cutaneous skin cancer began to grow, and sunscreens were readily available to the public.

But is the sun really bad for you? We find out what the facts are and what to do to stay safe.