

Shedding Some Light on Sunscreen

Summertime. Beach time. Long hours in the sun. Before you head out to the white hot sand, you'll want to pick up some sunscreen. But should you buy SPF 15? SPF 30? How about 45? Should you get a sun block? A sunscreen? Something that's waterproof?

If you're confused by the numbers and types of sunscreen, welcome to the club. Many Americans, it seems, are so confused by sunscreens that they don't even use them. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that only about 30 percent of adults regularly use sunscreen.

But take heart. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is writing new rules for sunscreen labeling, to help consumers figure out just what they need. All sunscreen products sold over the counter will need to follow certain labeling standards, and any SPF rating must have been tested to pass muster.



The FDA has proposed creating a new SPF category called 30-plus for any sun protection factor above 30. It has also proposed reducing five sun protection categories to three: minimum, moderate and high. No longer will terms such as "sunblock" and "waterproof" be allowed on labels, because they are inaccurate, the FDA says.

The agency has also listed 16 active ingredients, including zinc oxide and avobenzone, that are allowed in sunscreens.

In addition, the labels will also need to include a statement that emphasizes the importance of sunscreen in preventing skin problems and other harmful effects of the sun.

How do sunscreens work?

When ultraviolet (UV) rays strike the skin, they cause changes, including mutations in DNA. These mutations affect how well the DNA controls cell division, and can lead to cancer, experts say. The longer the skin's exposure to the sun, the greater the risk of developing skin problems.

Sunscreens work by absorbing and reflecting UV rays, preventing them from penetrating the skin. No sunscreen can block out 100 percent of the UV rays, however. That's why terms like "sunblock" are inaccurate.

Because sunlight contains both UVA and UVB rays, it's important to select a sunscreen that blocks both kinds, experts say. All children over 6 months of age and all adults should wear sunscreen. Lighter skinned people, particularly those with red or blond hair, are at greatest risk for burning.

Tips for avoiding the sun

- Stay out of the sun, particularly from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the sunlight—and the UV rays—are strongest. Look for shade, but be aware that a beach umbrella or shade tree can't block all UV rays. And a bright beach or snow-covered ground causes the UV rays to bounce around.
- You are still at risk on cloudy days, because clouds block only about 20 percent of UV rays.
- If you must be out in the sun, cover up with loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirt and pants to protect your skin.

- Wear a hat with a brim three to four inches wide to protect your face, head, neck and ears.
- Wear sunglasses that block as much UVA and UVB rays as possible. Sunglasses that wrap around your eyes are best, because they block UV rays from the sides.
- Apply sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 and one that offers protection from both UVA and UVB rays. Use at least an ounce of sunscreen each time you apply it. Reapply every couple hours, or more frequently if you are swimming or sweating.
- Remember that water doesn't block UV rays. Even if you spend most of your day in the water, you still need sunscreen.
- Children need protection from the sun, too. Give your child a wide-brimmed hat and don't forget the sunscreen.

Warning signs of skin cancer

Up to 1 million Americans are diagnosed with skin cancer each year, and experts say that number is on the rise.

Skin cancer comes in three types: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma. The first two types are the most common forms of skin cancer and are easily treated. If left untreated, however, they can cause disfigurement, but they aren't deadly.

Although melanoma is less common, it is more serious. If caught early, it is almost always curable. Melanoma is more likely than the other two forms of skin cancer to spread to other organs in the body.

The American Cancer Society and other experts urge people to regularly examine their skin for new moles or moles that change their shape or color.

The risk factors for melanoma include: moles, particularly a type called an atypical mole; fair skin; family history of melanoma; people whose immune system has been suppressed; large doses of UV radiation through sun exposure; severe, blistering sunburns, especially during childhood.

Wellness Library Health Ink and Vitality Communications ©2014

10 Steps to Breaking a Bad Habit



If you're one of the many Americans who has a stress-induced habit—like biting your nails or snacking when you're anxious—read on for a step-by-step guide to putting an end to these unhealthy coping mechanisms.

[Read More](#)

Relief for Neck and Shoulder Stiffness



Stress, poor posture, and prolonged keyboard use can all cause stiffness in your neck and shoulders. However, there are exercises and stretches that you can use during your workday to release and relieve any tension or stress that has built up in your aching muscles. Click the link below to read tips on how to relieve your neck and shoulder aches and pains.

[Read More](#)