

Summer School: Sunscreen 101

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Sunscreens are products applied to the skin to protect against the harmful effects of the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. UV rays are categorized as UVA (long waves, responsible for long-term damage and premature aging) or UVB (short waves, responsible for sunburns). Skin cancer, one of the most common cancers in the US, is closely linked to UV light exposure, including sunlight and tanning beds. Sunscreens help reduce the exposure to UV rays.

Tips for choosing a sunscreen:

- ✓ Choose a product with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. The SPF indicates the product's ability to block out UVB rays. For example, if it takes an unprotected person 10 minutes to burn in the sun, a SPF 15 product should allow 150 minutes of protection. A SPF of 15 or greater year-round with all skin types is highly recommended.
- ✓ Select a product with both UVA and UVB protection. Relying on SPF alone, no matter how high the number does NOT ensure full protection against all UV rays. Using a product of at least SPF 15 will ensure UVB coverage. Opting for a product with avobenzone will ensure full UVA coverage. Products with zinc oxide/titanium dioxide and a SPF of at least 15 will ensure protection from both UVA/UVB rays.
- ✓ Be cautious of "sun tanning" products; tan accelerators or self-tanners may not provide any UV protection.
- ✓ Pick a formulation that works the best for you:
 - *Water-resistant* – will maintain SPF for up to 40 minutes of swimming.
 - *Very water-resistant* – will protect for up to 80 minutes of swimming.
 - *Sweat-resistant* – will protect for up to 30 minutes of profuse sweating.
 - *Sensitive skin* – PABA is responsible for the majority of allergic reactions to sunscreens; people with sensitive skin should choose a PABA-free product.
 - *Children* – Infants under 6 months should be kept out of the sun. For children older than 6 months, PABA-free, milky lotion is preferred to an alcoholic lotion or gel that can cause stinging, burning, and irritation of the skin and eyes.
 - *Acne* – an oil-free, non-occlusive sunscreen formulation is appropriate.

Tips for sunscreen application:

- ✓ Be sure to apply the sunscreen 30 minutes before going out into the sunlight, covering all exposed areas including the ears, back of the neck, face, lips, back, and tops of the feet.
- ✓ Use at least one full ounce (30 ml) for each application. Many people only apply a thin layer on the skin, which reduces the amount of protection from the sun.
- ✓ Reapply every 2 hours or immediately after swimming, sweating, or towel drying.
- ✓ Purchase a new bottle of sunscreen if it changes color, dries up, changes consistency, or is older than 1 year as sunscreen products lose potency over time.
- ✓ SunSpots, are UVB sensitive stickers that can be applied to the skin. These stickers change colors indicating that it is time to apply more sunscreen, cover up or move indoors.

General tips for skin protection:

- ✓ Avoid direct sunlight between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are most intense.
- ✓ If you must be outside during these hours, try to stay in the shade being mindful that water, sand and snow can reflect the sun into shaded areas. UVA/UVB rays penetrate through clouds; protective measures should be taken even on cloudy days.
- ✓ Most windows only protect against UVB rays and provide little or no protection against UVA rays unless the glass is specially treated.
- ✓ Wear dark, tightly woven clothing (long sleeved shirts, pants, etc); the sun's rays shine through loosely woven clothing. You can tell whether it blocks out the sun by holding it up to the light.
- ✓ Wear a hat with at least a 4-inch brim.
- ✓ Wear sunglasses to protect the eyes and the sensitive skin around the eyes. Opt for sunglasses that specify both UVA/UVB protection. Sunglasses usually block out approximately 70-99% of UVB rays and 20-60% of UVA rays.
- ✓ Be sure to monitor freckles, moles or sunspots. If they grow in size, become raised, change shape/color or develop an irregular border, contact your physician immediately.

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