

SUNSCREEN & SKIN SELF-CHECKS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Who needs to use sunscreen?

- ☀ In a word: everyone (except babies under age 6 months)!

When should sunscreen be used?

- ☀ Sunscreen should be used every day if you are going to be in the sun for more than 20 minutes.
- ☀ Don't reserve the use of sunscreen only for sunny summer days. Even on a cloudy day, 80% of the sun's ultraviolet rays pass through the clouds.

What is sunscreen & what's the difference between sunscreen & sunblock?

- ☀ Sunscreens are chemical agents that help prevent the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation from reaching the skin.
- ☀ Since sunscreens can now either chemically absorb UV rays, or deflect them, the term sunblock is no longer used.

Are there different types of UV Rays?

- ☀ Ultraviolet (UV) rays are a form of invisible energy given off by the sun.
- ☀ Sunlight consists of two types of harmful rays — UVA rays and UVB rays.
 - ☀ UVA rays (which pass through window glass) penetrate deeper into the dermis, or base layer of the skin.
 - ☀ The UVB rays are the sun's burning rays (which are blocked by window glass) and are the primary cause of sunburn and skin cancer.
- ☀ "Reddening" of the skin is a reaction to UVB rays alone and tells you little about what UVA damage you may be getting.

What type of sunscreen is recommended?

- ☀ Sunscreens vary in their ability to protect against UVA and UVB.
- ☀ It's important to find a sunscreen that offers both UVA and UVB (broad spectrum) protection.
 - ☀ Ingredients which provide broad-spectrum protection include: benzophenones, oxybenzone, sulisobenzone, titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, avobenzone (parsol 1798), ecamsule (mexoryl sx).
- ☀ Ideally, sunscreens should be water resistant, so they cannot be easily removed by sweating or swimming, and should have an SPF of 15 or higher.
- ☀ If you have sensitive skin or allergies read the label. Avoid buying a brand that contains para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA) if you are sensitive to that ingredient.
- ☀ Be aware that more expensive does not mean better. Although a costly brand might feel or smell better, it is not necessarily more effective than a cheaper product.

What does SPF mean and how is it determined?

- ☀ SPF — or Sun Protection Factor — is a measure of a sunscreen's ability to prevent UVB from damaging the skin.
- ☀ The SPF numbers on the packaging can range from as low as 2 to greater than 50.

- ☀️ The sunscreen SPF rating is calculated by comparing the amount of time needed to produce a sunburn on sunscreen protected skin to the amount of time needed to cause a sunburn on unprotected skin.
- ☀️ Here's how it works: If it takes 20 minutes for your unprotected skin to start turning red, using an SPF 15 sunscreen theoretically prevents reddening 15 times longer — about five hours.
- ☀️ Another way to look at it is in terms of percentages: SPF 15 blocks approximately 93% of all incoming UVB rays. SPF 30 blocks 97%; and SPF 50 blocks 99%.

Does the SPF tell how well a sunscreen protects against UVA or UVB Rays?

- ☀️ The SPF number on sunscreens only reflects the product's screening ability for UVB rays. At present, there is no Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved rating system that identifies UVA protection.
- ☀️ Scientists are working to create a standardized testing system to measure UVA protection.

Does sunscreen expire?

- ☀️ Unless indicated by an expiration date, the FDA requires that all sunscreen be stable and at their original strength for at least three years.
- ☀️ While you can use the sunscreen that you bought last summer, keep in mind that if you are using the appropriate amount, a bottle of sunscreen should not last you very long.

How should I apply and use sunscreen?

- ☀️ Sunscreens should be applied to dry skin 15-30 minutes BEFORE going outdoors. If you're going to wear insect repellent or makeup, apply the sunscreen first.
- ☀️ One ounce, a palm full, is considered the amount needed to cover the exposed areas of the body properly.
- ☀️ No sunscreen, regardless of strength, should be expected to stay effective longer than two hours without reapplication.
- ☀️ Don't forget that lips get sunburned too, so apply a lip balm that contains sunscreen, preferably with an SPF of 15 or higher.

Is sunscreen application all I need to do to be sun-safe?

- ☀️ Sun exposure is the most preventable risk factor for skin cancer. The best sun protection is provided when all the sun-safe behaviors are practiced together. Sun protection habits include:
 - ☀️ Use broad-spectrum sunscreens whose active ingredients block UVA and UVB rays. The SPF (Sun Protective Factor) should be a minimum of 15.
 - ☀️ Limit sun exposure during the hours when the sun's rays are the strongest, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 - ☀️ Refer to the daily UV index when planning outdoor events.
 - ☀️ Seek Shade whenever possible.
 - ☀️ Your shadow is an indicator of the sun's intensity. If your shadow is shorter than you are, the sun is at its highest intensity. The American Academy of Dermatology has established the Shadow Rule: No Shadow — SEEK SHADE.
 - ☀️ Avoid direct sun exposure for infants.
 - ☀️ Wear protective clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses, when possible.
 - ☀️ Use extra caution near water, snow and sand as they reflect the damaging rays of the sun which can increase your chance of sunburn.
 - ☀️ Avoid tanning salons.

- ☀ Get vitamin D safely through a healthy diet that includes vitamin supplements. **Don't seek the sun.**
- ☀ Be a role model! These recommendations apply to both children and adults!

What is the UV index?

- ☀ The UV Index is a daily forecast of the intensity of the sun's UV rays. The Index indicates the risk of overexposure to skin-damaging UV radiation and can be used to help plan outdoor activities to minimize overexposure.
- ☀ The UV Index number, on a scale from 1 to 11+, is a measure of the amount of UV radiation reaching the earth's surface during an hour around noon.
 - ☀ The higher the UV Index number, the greater the amount of skin damaging UV radiation.

What should I check for when purchasing sunglasses?

- ☀ The ideal sunglasses do not have to be expensive, but they should block 99% to 100% UVA and UVB radiation to protect the eyes from damage. **Check the label to be sure they do.**
 - ☀ Some labels may say, "UV absorption up to 400 nm". This is the same as 100% UV absorption.
 - ☀ Also, labels that say "Meets ANSI UV Requirements" mean the glasses block at least 99% of UV rays.
 - ☀ Those labeled "cosmetic" block about 70% of the UV rays.
 - ☀ If there is no label, assume the sunglasses don't provide any protection.
- ☀ Darker glasses are not necessarily better because UV protection comes from an invisible chemical applied to the lenses, not from the color or darkness of the lenses.
- ☀ Large-framed and wraparound sunglasses are more likely to protect your eyes from light coming in from different angles.
- ☀ Children need smaller versions of real, protective adult sunglasses — not toy sunglasses.

Are tanning booths a safer way to tan?

- ☀ Artificial radiation carries all the risks of natural sunlight.
- ☀ Tanning lamps give out UVA and frequently UVB rays as well. Both UVA and UVB rays can cause short and long-term risks to the skin, including cataracts (eye damage), sunburns, skin cancer and premature aging. Thus, tanning to improve appearance is ultimately self-defeating.
- ☀ Because of these dangers, many health experts advise people to avoid sunlamps and tanning beds.

Is there a safe way to tan?

- ☀ There is no safe way to tan.
- ☀ A suntan is the skin's response to an injury. Every time you tan, you accumulate damage to the skin. This damage, in addition to accelerating the aging process, also increases your risk for all types of skin cancer, including melanoma.

What about tanning pills and other sunless products?

- ☀ No tanning pills have been approved by the FDA.
- ☀ Two other sunless tanning products, bronzers and extenders, are considered cosmetics for external use and are not thought to be harmful when used properly.
 - ☀ Bronzers, made from color additives approved by the FDA for cosmetic use, stain the skin for a short time when applied and can be washed off with soap and water.

- ☀ Extenders (also known as sunless tanners or self-tanners) are applied to the skin as lotions or creams, where they interact with protein on the surface of the skin to produce color. The color tends to wear off after a few days.
- ☀ Although they can give skin a darker color, these products do not protect you from the damaging effects of UV radiation, so continue to use sunscreen and practice sun safety behaviors when outdoors.

Why is it important to check my skin?

- ☀ It's important to examine your body monthly because skin cancers detected early can almost always be cured.
- ☀ Dermatologists recommend doing a skin check monthly, so you'll be more likely to notice any changes.

Are there different types of skin cancer?

- ☀ There are three major types of skin cancers: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma.
- ☀ Basal cell carcinoma is the most commonly diagnosed skin cancer.
 - ☀ Basal cell carcinoma usually appears on overexposed skin on the face, ears, lips, and particularly the nose.
 - ☀ Rarely does basal cell carcinoma result in death, but it can spread and cause more serious health problems.
 - ☀ Basal cell carcinomas can start as a red patch or shiny bump that is pink, red, or white. It may be crusty or have an open sore that won't heal.
- ☀ Squamous cell carcinoma is the second most common of skin cancers.
 - ☀ It is more aggressive than basal cell carcinoma and can spread to other parts of the body and may result in death.
 - ☀ Squamous cell carcinomas appear as a scaly patch or raised warty growth.
- ☀ Because of effective early detection and treatment, basal and squamous cell carcinomas have a cure rate of more than 95%.
- ☀ Melanoma is the most aggressive of the skin cancers.
 - ☀ Malignant melanoma is the most deadly of the three major skin cancers, causing approximately 75% of skin cancer deaths.
 - ☀ The incidence of melanoma is increasing at a rate faster than that of any other cancer. Melanoma cases in the United States have almost doubled in the past two decades.
 - ☀ Receiving one or two blistering sunburns before the age of 18 at least doubles an individual's risk for developing melanoma.
 - ☀ If not caught early, melanoma can spread to other parts of the body and can be fatal. However, when detected early, it is one of the most curable cancers.
 - ☀ Melanomas are usually dark brown or black mole-like patches with irregular edges.

What risk factors are associated with skin cancer?

- ☀ Exposure to UV radiation is an environmental factor in the development of skin cancer.
- ☀ Skin type is a factor in determining a person's risk for skin cancer. Skin types range from those individuals who burn easily and never suntan to those who do not burn at all.
- ☀ Even people with dark complexions can get a sunburn. No one is exempt from the possibility of getting skin cancer or other serious health problems from the sun's UV rays.
- ☀ Some individual characteristics that are risk factors for skin cancer include:
 - ☀ fair skin
 - ☀ blue, green, or hazel eyes

- ☀ light-colored hair
 - ☀ tendency to burn rather than suntan
 - ☀ history of severe burns, many moles, freckles
 - ☀ a family history of skin cancer
- ☀ Aside from skin tone, there are other factors that can also affect your risk of damage from UV light. You need to be especially careful in the sun if you:
- ☀ were previously treated for skin cancer
 - ☀ have a family history of skin cancer, especially melanoma
 - ☀ live or vacation at high altitudes (UV radiation increases 4% to 5% for every 1,000 feet above sea level)
 - ☀ live or vacation in tropical or subtropical climates
 - ☀ work indoors all week and then get a tan on weekends
 - ☀ spend a lot of time outdoors
 - ☀ have certain autoimmune diseases, such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE, or "lupus")
 - ☀ have had an organ transplant
 - ☀ take any medication that may increase your sensitivity to sunlight, ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about the risk of any medications

Skin Type	Sun History	Example
I	Always burns easily, never tans, extremely sensitive skin	Red-headed, freckles, Irish/Scots/Welsh
II	Always burns easily, tans minimally, sun sensitive skin	Fair-skinned, fair-headed, blue or green-eyed, Caucasians
III	Sometimes burns, tans gradually to light brown, sun sensitive skin	Average skin
IV	Burns minimally, always tans to moderate brown, minimally sun sensitive	Mediterranean-type Caucasians
V	Rarely burns, tans well, sun insensitive skin	Middle Eastern, some Hispanics, some African-Americans
VI	Never burns, deeply pigmented, sun insensitive skin	African-Americans

What are the other adverse health effects from over exposure to the sun?

- ☀ Besides the immediate effect of sunburn, over time excess UV radiation can cause skin cancer, premature aging, eye damage, and immune system suppression.
- ☀ Chronic exposure to the sun results in a change in the skin's texture causing wrinkles and furrows, easy bruising, brown or "liver spots", precancerous lesions (actinic keratoses), and potentially skin cancer.
- ☀ Sunlight is the primary source of UV radiation that can damage tissues of the eye. Spending long hours in the sun without eye protection increases the chances of developing eye diseases, including cataracts (a form of eye damage that causes the loss of transparency in the lens, clouding vision).
 - ☀ Because photoaging of the skin and UVB damage to the eyes is cumulative, it is never too late for a person to start a sun protection program.
- ☀ Sunburns can alter the distribution and function of disease-fighting white blood cells in humans for up to 24 hours after exposure to the sun. Repeated overexposure to UV radiation can cause more damage to the body's immune system. Mild sunburns can directly suppress the immune functions of human skin where the sunburn occurred, even in people with dark skin.

How do I treat a sunburn?

- ☀ Sunburns can be painful as well as dangerous.
- ☀ There are several types of burns and burn treatments. The two most common sunburns are first-degree burns and second degree burns.
 - ☀ First-degree sunburns cause redness and will heal, possibly with some peeling, within a few days. These can be painful and are best treated with cool baths and moisturizers or over-the-counter hydrocortisone creams.
 - ☀ Second degree sunburns blister and can be considered a medical emergency if a large area is affected. When a burn is severe, accompanied by a headache, chills or a fever, **seek medical help right away.**
- ☀ Be sure to protect your skin from the sun while it heals and thereafter.
- ☀ Most studies have found an association between sunburn and enhanced risk for melanoma, particularly if you suffered severe childhood or adolescent sunburn since there is more time for melanoma to develop over your lifetime.

How do I complete a skin self-check?

- ☀ A self-exam is best done in a well-lit room in front of a full-length mirror. You can use a hand-held mirror for areas that are hard to see. A spouse or close friend or family member may be able to help you with these exams, especially for those hard-to-see areas like the lower back or the back of your thighs.
- ☀ The first time you inspect your skin, spend a fair amount of time carefully going over the entire surface of your skin. Learn the pattern of moles, blemishes, freckles, and other marks on your skin so that you'll notice any changes next time. **Any trouble spots should be seen by a doctor.**
- ☀ Follow these step-by-step instructions to examine your skin:
 - ☀ Face the mirror:
 - ☀ Check your face, ears, neck, chest, and belly (Women may need to lift breasts to check the skin underneath)
 - ☀ Check the underarm areas, both sides of your arms, the tops and bottoms of your hands, in between your fingers, and fingernail beds
 - ☀ Sit Down:
 - ☀ Check the front of your thighs, shins, tops of your feet, in between your toes, and toenail beds
 - ☀ Use a hand mirror:
 - ☀ Now look at the bottoms of your feet, your calves, and the backs of your thighs, first checking one leg and then the other
 - ☀ Check the buttocks, genital area, lower back, upper back, and the back of the neck (It may be easier to look at your back in the wall mirror using a hand mirror for assistance)
 - ☀ Use a comb or hair dryer to part your hair so that you can check your scalp in the mirror
- ☀ **Be sure to show your doctor any area that concerns you. A qualified doctor should be able to identify any suspicious areas you may have.**

What Should I look for?

- ☀ The most important warning sign is a spot on the skin that is changing in size, shape, or color during a period of 1 month to 1 or 2 years.
- ☀ Look for new growths, spots, bumps, patches, or sores that don't heal after 2 to 3 months.
- ☀ Skin cancers often take the following forms:
 - ☀ Pale, wax-like, pearly nodules.
 - ☀ Red, scaly, sharply outlined patches.

- ☀ Sores that don't heal.
- ☀ Small, mole-like growths—melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer.
- ☀ **If you find such unusual skin changes, see a health care professional immediately.**

Where can I learn more about sun safety and protecting our children?

- ☀ With one in five Americans developing skin cancer, childhood education about sun protection is a vital step toward reducing risk and improving public health.
- ☀ Educating school staff and students about sun safety can prevent many health problems related to overexposure to the sun.
 - ☀ National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention
<http://www.skincancerprevention.org/>
 - ☀ Shade Foundation of America
<http://www.shadefoundation.org/>
 - ☀ Sun Safety for Kids
<http://www.sunsafetyforkids.org>
 - ☀ Sun Protection Foundation
<http://www.sunprotectionfoundation.org/>
 - ☀ Sun Safety Alliance
<http://www.sunsafetyalliance.org/>
 - ☀ SunWise Program
<http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/>

Sources

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