

Choosing the Best Sunscreen for You and Your Family

by Elizabeth Waldinger

While we get outside and enjoy the warmer weather, it's essential to protect our most vulnerable organ – our skin. With all the different brands and types of sunscreen on the market, choosing the one that's best for you and your family can be overwhelming. Here are some things to consider to help you select a sunscreen that's right for all your outdoor adventures.

What is Sunscreen?

Sunscreen is an over-the-counter drug that acts as a barrier to protect skin from absorbing ultraviolet (UV) rays. There are two kinds of UV rays – UVA and UVB. UVA rays can age the skin while UVB rays cause sunburn. According to FDA regulations, sunscreen is called “broad spectrum” only if it protects from both UVA and UVB rays.

Along with the broad spectrum factor, sunscreens are rated based on their Sun Protection Factor, or SPF. The SPF is a rating of how well the sunscreen blocks the sun's rays. For example, sunscreen with an

SPF of 30 will block 97 percent of the sun's UVB rays, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. The higher the SPF, the better the sunscreen blocks harmful rays. However, no sunscreen blocks 100 percent of the UV rays, and sunscreens with an SPF rating above 30 provide only a small amount of additional protection.

Types of Sunscreen

Although there are hundreds of brands of sunscreen on the market, they aren't all created equal. Different types of sunscreen offer different benefits. Aside from SPF levels, there are two main types of sunscreens. Chemical sunscreens are most common and absorb harmful UV rays before they reach the skin. While these lotions and sprays are easier to apply and leave no white residue, you will need to reapply more often. Alternatively, mineral sunscreens (or physical sunscreens) form a barrier on our skin that reflects or filters UVA and UVB rays. The formulas containing zinc oxide or titanium dioxide can be more difficult to spread on your skin and leave behind a white cast; however, they last longer than chemical formulas and are considered more natural.

Choosing What's Best for You

Simply put, the best sunscreen is the one you and your family will actually use! Dr. David Lortscher, board-certified dermatologist and CEO of Curology, and his team recommend a minimum of SPF 30 to all of their patients. When selecting your sunscreen, consider what type of activity you'll be doing. For a day at the beach or strenuous exercise,

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wear a sunscreen that is water-resistant and reapply it often. Purchasing a sunscreen that also contains insect repellent may sound like a great idea, but experts warn against this. While sunscreens should be applied generously and often, insect repellent should be used sparingly and less frequently. It's important to note that dermatologists agree that sunscreens should ideally be worn all year – even on gray, cloudy days.

The Right Way to Use Sunscreen

Most people don't use enough sunscreen to protect their skin fully, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. Most only use 25–50 percent of the recommended amount of sunscreen. “A liberal amount (1 ounce) of sunscreen is a good amount to be used when most of your skin is exposed while wearing a swimsuit and should be applied every two hours,” says Dr. Delphine J. Lee, a dermatologist at Providence Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, California. While it's common to wait until you get outside to apply sunscreen, it is best to apply it 20 minutes before going outside so it has time to bond with the skin. Don't forget to protect the thin, sensitive skin on your lips. Lip balms that contain sunscreen are the best way to protect the lip area. If you or your child have a habit of licking your lips, then be sure to apply it often.



Our skin is the largest organ on our body, and keeping it safe from the harmful effects of the sun's rays is extremely important. Whatever the time of year and weather forecast, make sure you're choosing a sunscreen that's right for you and your family. Applying protection to all areas of exposed skin and reapplying during times of higher activity can have a major impact on your health in the long run. ♦

Other Ways to Protect Your Skin...

Here are some additional ways to protect your skin from the sun's harmful UVA and UVB rays.

1. Choose swimwear and activewear specifically designed to block UV rays.
2. Seek shade and limit direct exposure to the sun between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm.
3. Avoid using tanning beds and sun lamps, which can cause serious long-term skin damage.
4. When you're in the sun, wear clothing, especially fabrics that are dark and tightly woven.
5. Wear a wide-brimmed hat to protect as much skin as possible.
6. Protect your eyes with sunglasses that block at least 99% of UV light.