
Sunscreen

Does sunscreen work?

No sunscreen or sunblock applied to the skin will completely block all the damaging rays. Think of them as an extra aid which should be used with common sense, sun avoidance and protective clothing.

According to researchers, sunscreen does not protect against melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer. Although most sunblocking agents seem to prevent burning, they are not very good at blocking the UVA that causes skin cancer and premature aging. Unfortunately, they are effective at blocking UVB, the wavelengths our bodies need to produce vitamin D. In addition, because you aren't receiving enough UVB to cause a sunburn, you gain a false sense of security because you are receiving much more UVA by remaining longer outdoors. Sunscreens sometimes contain toxic chemicals that can cause allergies and may even increase your risk of disease such as multiple sclerosis and breast, colon and ovarian cancers.

Researchers have found that even sunscreens with the highest protection factors over SPF 50, applied in the correct amounts, were not effective at filtering out the harmful UVA rays. Newer sunscreens containing so-called UVA protection, do not completely filter out all the UVA rays. It is recommended that people instead should limit their sunbathing time and use sun protective clothing and hats to block UVA rays when sun is at its strongest (9 am to 4 pm). UVA is easily transmitted through clouds, so the same protection should be used on cloudy days. UVA does cause premature aging of the skin and skin cancers, including AKs, Basal Cell Carcinoma, Squamous Cell Carcinoma, and Melanoma.

Should I avoid the sun completely?

With all the negative articles that the media has provided us with regard to sun exposure, you may be tempted to avoid the sun completely. But remember that we ALL need sunshine to stay healthy. Exposure to the sun provides many benefits such as promoting the formation of Vitamin D and fighting depression.

This does not mean that we should all go out and get as much sun as we want; you must exercise caution. You only require about 8 minutes of early morning sun to get the Vitamin D you need. Wear a hat and long sleeves and plan your outdoor activities before 9 a.m. and after 4 p.m. Get checked at least annually for melanoma and skin cancer by your dermatologist.

What can I do to protect my skin?

Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) is one of the most effective antioxidants. It has been demonstrated to moderately protect against UVB photo damage as well as UVA phototoxic responses. Of major importance is the ability of Vitamin C to regenerate the lipid-soluble Vitamin E, so that it retains its cellular membrane protective activity. Combinations of Vitamin C with Vitamin E offer greater protection against cellular damage from UVB/UVA exposure than either antioxidant alone.

As an antioxidant, Vitamin C affords considerable protection to our skins' cells. Vitamin C 'breaks' the chain-reaction of free radicals before they can cause destruction of the cellular membranes. However, it requires a recharging assistant like Vitamin E, otherwise Vitamin C is rapidly depleted.

Frequent reapplications of topical Vitamin C and Vitamin E are recommended if you will be exposed for long durations. When choosing a topical Vitamin C brand, make sure the Vitamin C is consistently fresh such as in our line of products.

Oral Vitamin C is also useful in amounts of 1 g per day or more in promoting antioxidant protection.

Sunscreens containing only zinc oxide (the white stuff) are considered safe by most experts. This chemical also blocks UVA and UVB but has the drawback of the white color.

A relative newcomer to the sun protection arena, Heliocare is a natural product made from the fern, Polypodium leucotomos, which is taken as capsules, usually four every 2-3 hours while in the sun. It has been shown to prevent sunburn in lab animals by researchers at Harvard.

Most sun damage and skin cancers appear on the left side of the face because of increased time spent in the car. Consider adding a UVA-protective clear plastic film like Llumar to driver and passenger windows of your vehicle. Call (800) 255-8627 to find a dealer who can install this film.

What about tanning?

Tanned skin, whether from out-of-doors or a tanning salon, is a sign that the skin has been damaged. The sales pitch that tanning beds offer a "safe tan" is not true. The bulbs used in tanning beds emit 2-3 times the intensity of UVA radiation that the earth receives from the sun. An individual who is exposed to tanning bed radiation for 30 minutes receives photo damage equivalent to that obtained during an entire day spent "baking" at the beach. The regular use of

tanning beds greatly increase the risk of skin cancer, especially deadly melanoma, and accelerates premature aging of the skin. Getting a "base tan" is about as useful for preventing skin cancer as a few puffs on a cigarette is for preventing lung cancer. There is no "safe" tan.

Avoiding sun is still the best policy. Sunscreens are designed to protect you against unavoidable sun, they are not supposed to be used to increase your time in the sun.