

STEP UP YOUR SUNSCREEN KNOWLEDGE

As summer heats up, protect your family with the right kind of sunblock

WRITTEN BY KAREN HAYWOOD QUEEN

Do you know it all about shielding your skin from the sun's harmful rays? That sunscreen you're slathering on may help prevent sunburn, but it may not effectively protect your skin from skin cancer and signs of aging. As summer fun hits its stride, it's time to take a look at what sunscreen to use, how much is enough, and how often to apply it. What's best for sensitive skin, athletes or babies varies, and it's beneficial to know the differences.

What is Best to Use

Look for a label of broad spectrum protection—or even better, sunblock, dermatologists say. You want to protect your skin from both UVA and UVB rays. Here's one way to remember it: UVA rays contribute to skin aging, while UVB rays contribute to sun burns. Both contribute to skin cancer.

The sun's rays are measured in nanometers. UVB rays are 290 to 320 nanometers, whereas UVA rays are 320 to 400, says Dr. Melissa Schwarzschild of Rich-

mond Dermatology and Laser Specialists. One chemical might block 290 to 300, while another blocks 310 to 330, Schwarzschild says.

Sunscreen manufacturers try to stack the chemicals to get maximum protection, but "there are holes where there is no protection at all," she says.

For daily use, Schwarzschild recommends sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30.

For even more protection, choose a brand with a sunblock—zinc oxide or titanium oxide, she says, and the higher the percentage, the better. "They're inert and sit on your skin like you have a piece of cardboard against your skin," she says. "They block a wider range of UVA rays than sunscreen."

Titanium oxide is good, but it protects your skin only from rays up to 340 nanometers, according to Schwarzschild. Zinc oxide "is the only agent that protects you from rays 290 to 400, with no holes," she says. "It's full protection. Nothing is as full spectrum as zinc oxide. If I can get somebody to put zinc oxide on, I'm happy."

Remember lifeguards with the white painted noses? That's zinc oxide, and its downside is that pasty look, Schwarzschild acknowledges. If you're concerned about that aspect, look for a label that says "micronized," which means the zinc oxide has been broken up into tiny particles for a less obvious appearance. Schwarzschild personally recommends Eucerin Every Day Protection for Faces, with 3.6 percent zinc oxide.

Specifically for Babies and Kids

For babies, the first sun defense is covering them up with hats and long clothing, says Dr. Kelly DeHart of Pariser Dermatology, with offices in Carrollton, Newport News, Norfolk, Williamsburg and Virginia Beach. The next step is products with zinc oxide, which is a key ingredient in diaper rash creams, or titanium oxide.

As an added advantage, that white pasty color will make it obvious where you may have missed a spot, DeHart says—and babies won't care what it looks like. DeHart suggests Banana Boat Baby.

NEW FDA LABELS WILL OFFER MORE ACCURATE INFORMATION

Manufacturer claims about sunscreen power will be subject to more stringent examination

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Sweatproof? Waterproof? New labels required by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will limit the claims on sunscreen labels, and require those promises to undergo vigorous testing. Here's what you need to know:

No sunscreens are waterproof, the FDA says, because all sunscreens eventually wash off. Under the new rules, sunscreens can no longer be labeled "sweatproof" or "waterproof"; instead, labels may say only "water-resistant." The label also must specify whether the water-resistant sunscreen provides 40 or 80 minutes of protection while swimming or sweating, the FDA says. All sunscreens will be required to provide directions regarding when to reapply.

Under the new label requirements, any sunscreen labeled "broad spectrum" will have to pass a test showing the product provides UVA protection proportional to the UVB protection, the FDA says.

Consumers should know...

SPF 2-14 may not offer enough protection. Scientific data has shown that broad spectrum sunscreens of SPF 15 or higher have been shown to reduce the risk of skin cancer and early skin aging, and can prevent sun-

burn when used with other sun-protection measures, the FDA says. But sunscreens offering less than SPF 15 will have to include "may not protect against skin cancer" on the label, the FDA says. (Dr. Melissa Schwarzschild of Richmond Dermatology and Laser Specialists recommends SPF of 30 or more.)

You may see...

Lots of different labels this summer. The FDA's new testing and labeling rules, approved in June 2011, had been set to go into effect this June for major manufacturers. Now they take effect in December 2012. Smaller manufacturers still have until December 2013 to comply.

Although some manufacturers have already completed testing and labeling and products are available to consumers now, other manufacturers might not have been able to make the deadline, the FDA said in May, when announcing the extension for major manufacturers. The agency was concerned that these sunscreen-makers might temporarily discontinue their broad spectrum products even though their products might ultimately pass the broad spectrum test, the FDA says. ☐

BY THE NUMBERS

What does SPF mean? Does SPF 30 offer double the protection of SPF 15? No, say DeHart and Schwarzschild.

Under current labels, SPF protection covers only UVB rays, Schwarzschild says. "With SPF 50 you could be out in the sun 50 times longer before you got the same amount of UVB rays [as you would without sunscreen]," she says. "But it could have zero UVA protection."

Under current labels, SPF 8 protects against 87 percent of UVB rays, she says, while SPF 15 protects against 93 percent of UVB rays. SPF 50 protects against up to 98 percent of UVB rays. New labels will require sunscreens claiming "broad spectrum" protection to protect against both UVA and UVB rays.

And don't forget wearing hats or cover-ups to battle the sun, too, doctors say. After all, "White is the new tan," Dehart says.

Specifically for Sensitive Skin

For sensitive skin, Schwarzschild again suggests sunblocks with zinc oxide or titanium oxide. People tend to have allergic reactions to the chemical agents in sunscreens, she says, but specifically formulated products can be found for sensitive skin. DeHart suggests Aveeno Positively Radiant Daily Moisturizer, which comes in SPF 15 or SPF 30.

Sunscreens for People Who Don't Like the Hassle

Want a quick, easy solution? A sunscreen spray may be the answer for you or antsy children and teens who can't bear to sit still and apply lotion. "Sprays go on quickly," DeHart says. "You have to use them more often; you can just pull it out of your bag. You do still have to rub it in, but they're convenient. I play golf, and every hour, I just spray myself down again."

Specifically for Swimmers and Sweaters

Start reading labels. New sunscreen labels required by the Food and Drug Administration allow sunscreen manufacturers to say only that a sunscreen is water-resistant, not waterproof, DeHart says. And the label will have to specify whether the product is water-resistant for 40 minutes or 80 minutes, based on standard testing, he says.

"The old labels can give a false sense of security," DeHart continues. "People may think, 'Because it's waterproof, I'm good for the rest of the day.'"

More is Better

Your shot glass isn't just for measuring your post-sun liquid relaxation. You should use a shot glass full of sunscreen or sunblock to cover your body, DeHart says.

"Research shows that most people put on only one-half to one-fourth of what they need," DeHart says. "If

they're using SPF 15, they may be getting only SPF 2."

Even a big dab won't do you for the whole day. You should reapply sunscreen every two hours, and more often if you're getting wet or sweating, DeHart says. The chemicals used in sunscreen are fragile, with half-lives of less than two hours, Schwarzschild says. Manufacturers add other products to sunscreen to stabilize these fragile chemicals, meaning you should put on more throughout the day to keep yourself protected.

"The average bottle of sunscreen is about eight ounces," Schwarzschild says. "This is going to sound crazy, but if a family of four went to the beach, they should go through a bottle of sunscreen in a day if they reapply it."

And don't think you can save sunscreen forever: Kept at room temperature, the product has a shelf life of about one year, Schwarzschild says, so you should throw out whatever has been gathering dust in your bathroom for longer than you can remember. ☐