

SUNSCREEN TIPS

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[HTTP://WWW.EWG.ORG/2014SUNSCREEN/TOP-SUN-SAFETY-TIPS/MAKE SUNSCREEN PART OF YOUR OUTDOOR GEAR](http://www.ewg.org/2014sunscreen/top-sun-safety-tips/make-sunscreen-part-of-your-outdoor-gear)

1. Tips for finding a good sunscreen

Ingredients matter. Does your sunscreen leave you overexposed to damaging UVA rays? Does it break down in the sun? Does it contain compounds that may disrupt your hormones?

2. First things first

Check your skin regularly for new moles that are tender or growing. Ask your primary care doctor how often you should see a dermatologist.

The best defenses against getting too much harmful UV radiation are protective clothing, shade and timing. Our checklist:

- Don't get burned. Red, sore, blistered or peeling skin means far too much sun – and raises your skin cancer risk.
- Wear clothes. Shirts, hats, shorts and pants provide the best protection from UV rays – and they don't coat your skin with goop.

Find shade – or make it. Picnic under a tree, read beneath an umbrella, take a canopy to the beach. Keep infants in the shade – they lack the tanning pigments known as melanin to protect their skin.

Plan around the sun. Go outdoors in early morning or late afternoon, when the sun is lower. UV radiation peaks at midday.

Sunglasses aren't just a fashion accessory. Good shades protect your eyes from UV radiation that causes cataracts.

3. Now put on sunscreen

Some sunscreens prevent sunburn but not other types of skin damage. Make sure yours offers broad spectrum protection.

Don't fall for high SPF labels. Anything higher than SPF 50+ can tempt you to stay in the sun too long. Even if you don't burn, your skin may be damaged. Stick to SPFs between 15 and 50+. Pick a product based on your own skin coloration, time outside, shade and cloud cover. Reapply often.

Avoid sunscreen with vitamin A. Eating vitamin A-laden vegetables is good for you, but spreading vitamin A on your skin may not be. Government data show that tumors and lesions develop sooner on skin coated with creams laced with vitamin A, also called retinyl palmitate or retinol. It's in 20 percent of all sunscreens we reviewed in 2014. Avoid any skin or lip product whose label includes retinyl palmitate, retinol or vitamin A.

Avoid oxybenzone, a synthetic estrogen that penetrates the skin and can disrupt the hormone system. Look for products with zinc oxide, 3% avobenzone or Mexoryl SX. They protect skin from harmful UVA radiation.

No insect repellent. If you need bug repellent, buy it separately and apply it first.

Pick a good sunscreen. EWG's sunscreen database rates the safety and efficacy of about 700 SPF-rated products, including about 460 sunscreens for beach and sports use. We give high ratings to brands that provide broad spectrum, long-lasting

protection with ingredients that pose fewer health concerns when absorbed by the body.

Don't spray. Sprays cloud the air with tiny particles that may not be safe to breathe.

Reapply cream often. Sunscreen chemicals sometimes degrade in the sun, wash off or rub off on towels and clothing.

Men ignore sun safety at their peril. In 2009, nearly twice as many American men died from melanoma as women. Surveys show that 34 percent of men wear sunscreens, compared to 78 percent of women.

Got your vitamin D? Many people don't get enough vitamin D, a hormone manufactured by the skin in the presence of sunlight. Your doctor can test your level and recommend supplements if you are low in this vital nutrient.

4. Sun safety tips for kids

A few blistering sunburns in childhood can double a person's lifetime chances of developing serious forms of skin cancer. The best sunscreen is a hat and shirt. After that, protect kids with a sunscreen that's effective and safe.

Take these special precautions with infants and children:

Infants

Infants under six months should be kept out of direct sun as much as possible. Their skin is not yet protected by melanin.

When you take your baby outside:

Cover up – with protective clothing, tightly woven but loose-fitting, and a sun hat.

Make shade – Use the stroller's canopy or hood. If you can't sit in a shady spot, use an umbrella.

Avoid midday sun – Take walks in the early morning or late afternoon.

Follow product warnings for sunscreens on infants less than 6 months old. Most manufacturers advise against using sunscreens on infants or advise parents and caregivers to consult a doctor first. The American Academy of Pediatrics says that small amounts of sunscreen can be used on infants as a last resort when shade can't be found.

Toddlers and children

Sunscreens are an essential part of a day in the sun. But young children's skin is especially sensitive to chemical allergens – as well as the sun's UV rays.

Test sunscreen by applying a small amount on the inside of your child's wrist the day before you plan to use it. If an irritation or rash develops, try another product. Ask your child's doctor to suggest a product less likely to irritate your child's skin.

Slop on sunscreen and reapply it often, especially if your child is playing in the water or sweating a lot.

Sun safety at school

Send a sunscreen to daycare and school. Some childcare facilities provide sunscreen, but you can buy your own to make sure it's safe and effective. Share EWG's safe sunscreen tips and product suggestions with your child's school and caregiver.

Sometimes school and daycare policies interfere with children's sun safety. Many schools treat sunscreen as a medicine and require written permission to use it on a child. Some insist that the school nurse apply it. Some ban hats and sunglasses. Here are a few questions to ask your school:

What is the policy on sun safety?

Is there shade on the playground?

Are outdoor activities scheduled to avoid midday sun?

Teens

Teenagers coveting bronzed skin are likely to sunbathe, patronize tanning salons or buy self-tanning products – all bad ideas.

Researchers believe that increasing UV exposure may have caused the marked increase in melanoma incidence noted among women born after 1965. Tanning parlors expose the skin to as much as 15 times more UV radiation than the sun and likely contribute to the melanoma increase.

To parents of teens: Be good role models – let your teen see that you protect yourself from the sun. Tan does not mean healthy.

Sunscreen Don'ts

What not to take on vacation!

Packing for your next vacation or day in the sun? EWG thinks these items should never make it into your suitcase, beach bag or backpack.

- No spray sunscreens
- No super-high SPFs
- No oxybenzone
- No retinyl palmitate
- No combined sunscreen/bug repellents
- No sunscreen powders or towelettes
- No tanning oils



1) No spray sunscreens

Given the ease of applying them on squirming kids and hard-to-reach areas, these super-popular aerosolized sunscreens may seem like a dream come true. But they may pose serious inhalation risks. They certainly make it too easy to apply too little or miss a spot.

Even though the Food and Drug Administration has expressed concern about the safety and efficacy of spray sunscreens, companies continue to turn them out.

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2) No super-high SPFs

Products with sky-high SPFs may protect against sunburn but could leave your skin exposed to damaging UVA rays.

SPF stands for “sun protection factor,” and refers only to protection against UVB radiation, which burns the skin. It has little to do with protection from sun’s UVA rays, which penetrate deep into the skin, suppress the immune system, accelerate skin aging and may cause skin cancer.

Fifteen percent of the sunscreens evaluated in EWG’s 2014 sunscreen guide boasts SPFs higher than SPF 50+. These high-SPF products may give people a false sense of security, tempt them to stay in the sun too long, suppress sunburns but upping the risk of other kinds of skin damage. The FDA is considering limiting SPF claims to 50+, as is done in other countries.

EWG recommends that consumers avoid products labeled with anything higher than SPF 50 and reapply sunscreen often, regardless of SPF.

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3) No oxybenzone

Commonly used in sunscreens, the chemical oxybenzone penetrates the skin, gets into the bloodstream and acts like estrogen in the body. It can trigger allergic reactions. Data are preliminary, but studies have found a link between higher concentrations of oxybenzone and health harms. One study has linked oxybenzone to endometriosis in older women; another found that women with higher levels of oxybenzone during pregnancy had lower birth weight daughters.

More than 40 percent of all beach and sport sunscreens in this year's guide contain oxybenzone.

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4) No retinyl palmitate

When used in a night cream, this form of vitamin A is supposed to have anti-aging effects. But on sun-exposed skin, retinyl palmitate may speed development of skin tumors and lesions, according to government studies. Why is this “inactive ingredient” allowed in sunscreens intended for use in the sun? Good question.

The FDA has yet to rule on the safety of retinyl palmitate in skin care products, but EWG recommends that consumers avoid sunscreens containing this chemical.

Twenty percent of the sunscreens, and 12 percent of SPF-rated moisturizers in this year’s guide contains retinyl palmitate.

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5) No combined sunscreen/bug repellents

Skip products that combine bug repellent with sunscreen. Why? For starters, bugs are typically not a problem during the hours when UV exposure peaks. Also, sunscreen may need to be reapplied more frequently than repellent, or vice versa. We recommend that you avoid using repellents on your face, too. Studies suggest that combining sunscreens and repellents leads to increased skin absorption of the repellent ingredients. EWG recommends that you skip these products.

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6) No sunscreen towelettes or powders

FDA's sunscreen rules bar sunscreen wipes and powders. But some small online retailers are still offering towelettes and powders. Don't buy them. Why? Dubious sun protection. Besides, inhaling loose powders can cause lung irritation or other harm.

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7) No tanning oils

Tanning oils are simply a bad idea.

If they contain sunscreen ingredients, the levels are always very low and offer little, if any, sun protection. Don't buy products with SPF values lower than 15, nor those without either zinc oxide or avobenzone for UVA protection.