

SUNSCREEN:

What do I need to know?

What should I look for when I buy sunscreen?

Look for the words “broad spectrum” and use SPF 30 or higher. Broad spectrum protects against both UVA and UVB radiation. This will protect against sunburn, skin cancer and premature aging. Manufacturers can no longer claim sunscreens are “waterproof” or “sweatproof” or identify their products as “sunblocks.”

What about the ingredients? Are they safe?

The safety of sunscreens has been studied in labs and on live subjects by research scientists for many years. Consumers should rest assured that sunscreens, specifically the ingredients oxybenzone and retinyl palmitate, are safe and effective. This evidence is overwhelming. The claims that sunscreens are unsafe or can cause cancer are not based on facts or scientific research. Some people also claim that sunscreen prevents sweating. This is inaccurate.

What about for my kids?

Sunscreen is safe for children above the age of six months. You may prefer to use clothing and hats for sensitive skin on babies, toddlers and children. Remember, sunscreen is only one way to protect your child’s skin from the sun — protective clothing and shade should also be used whenever possible.

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What does SPF mean?

SPF stands for sun protection factor. It refers to how much ultraviolet (UV) radiation it takes to burn your skin when it is unprotected versus when your skin is protected with sunscreen. SPF relates to both the duration of sun exposure and the intensity of the sun's rays. Therefore, the time of day your skin is exposed to the sun also plays a role. The bottom line is, the higher the SPF, the more protection it offers from sunburn. The MRF recommends using SPF of at least 30.

How much sunscreen should I use?

Sunscreen should be applied liberally approximately 15 minutes before sun exposure. You should use at least one ounce (a shot glassful) to cover the whole body and reapply every two hours you are out in the sun. It should be reapplied every hour if you are sweating or swimming. Don't forget about your lips, ears, hands, feet and the back of the neck.

How will I get vitamin D if I use sunscreen?

Research shows that regular sunscreen use does not prevent vitamin D production. Children and adults should obtain vitamin D from fish, fortified dairy products and cereals. Claims that tanning beds increase vitamin D production are misleading and false. If you are concerned about your vitamin D levels, speak with your doctor. The bottom line is: vitamin D should be obtained in a way that does not risk UV damage.

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