

All about SPF



We all know it's important to use an SPF product to protect us against the sun. But how much do you really know about sunscreen? Here are a few quick facts from The Skin Cancer Foundation and the American Academy of Dermatology. Learn more about different types of sunscreen, why it helps and what those little numbers really mean.

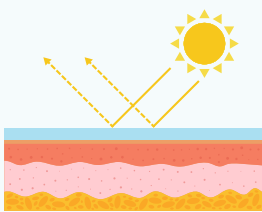


What is sunscreen?

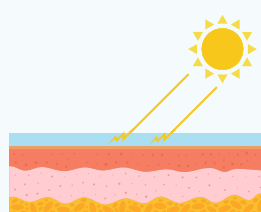
Sunscreen is a cream, oil or other topical treatment that helps **prevent the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation from reaching your skin.**

Are there different types of sunscreen?

Yes. **Mineral and chemical sunscreen ingredients are both used to create different types of sunscreen.** Both have been tested as safe and effective by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.



Mineral sunscreens block and scatter the sun's rays before they penetrate your skin. For a mineral sunscreen, ingredients listed on the label may include **titanium dioxide** and **zinc oxide**.



Chemical sunscreens absorb UV rays before they can damage your skin. For a chemical sunscreen, ingredients listed on the label may include **avobenzone** and **octisalate**.



What does SPF stand for?

SPF stands for **sun protection factor**. You can also think of it as the “sunburn” protection factor. The number that follows explains how much protection you have against the sun’s UVB rays. If you properly apply an SPF 15 product, for example, it will take you 15 times longer to burn than if you used no sunscreen at all. A higher-number SPF does not mean it lasts longer than a lower SPF number. **Dermatologists recommend using a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30.** SPF 30 sunscreen blocks 97% of the sun’s UVB rays. Higher-number SPFs block slightly more of the sun’s UVB rays, but no sunscreen can block 100% of the sun’s UVB rays.



When do I need sunscreen?

Every day. Your skin is exposed to the sun’s rays every time you go outside, all year long and on cloudy days. Research has shown that 1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime. **Regular daily use of SPF sunscreen can reduce your risk of developing common forms of skin cancer.** Sunscreen can also help protect against signs of premature aging, such as wrinkles and age spots, caused by sun exposure.



How do I apply it?

The best time to apply sunscreen is at **least 15 minutes before going outside.** You should apply at least 1 ounce (about a shot glass full) and allow it to absorb into the skin. Apply sunscreen to any skin on your body that is not covered by clothing or may be exposed throughout the day. Reapply every two hours, especially after swimming or sweating.



What kind of sunscreen should I use?

The American Academy of Dermatology says the best sunscreen to use is the one you are most likely to use consistently. Try different types so you can find what works for you. Those with sensitive skin or who have had skin reactions to sunscreens in the past may consider sunscreens containing only mineral ingredients as they are often less irritating. Be sure to choose a sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher that is labeled as water-resistant and broad-spectrum. **Broad-spectrum SPF protects you against both UVA and UVB rays.** You’ll need to reapply every two hours, even if your skin remains dry.

All skin types, including darker skin tones, should use sunscreen. Sunscreens are developed with all skin tones in mind. Formulas exist that won’t leave a white cast on darker skin. Keep in mind that babies under six months have sensitive skin that should not be exposed to sunscreen. If you have an infant, keep their skin covered with sun-protective clothing and out of direct sunlight.

You can enjoy the summer sun and protect your skin by finding and choosing the right sunscreen for you and your family.

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