

What Parents Should Know About Using Sunscreen

SPF Math

There are two ways to understand Sun Protection Factor (SPF):

1. How long can you stay in the sun without burning? If your skin typically reddens in about 20 minutes, SPF 15 means you can stay in the sun about five hours (20 minutes x 15 = 300 minutes or 5 hours).

2. How much sunburn-causing ultraviolet B (UVB) rays does it block?

- SPF 15 blocks about 93 percent
- SPF 30 blocks about 97 percent
- SPF 50 blocks about 99 percent

If properly applied, SPF 50 should protect as well as a t-shirt, but note: *Even SPF ratings as high as 80 can never give 100 percent UVB protection.*



UVA Awareness

Ultraviolet A rays are present at all times of day, even when it's overcast. Look for the words "broad spectrum," to guarantee your sunscreen will protect you from these deep penetrating rays, which are linked to melanoma, glaucoma and lowered immunity.

Key ingredients to look for on the sunscreen label are:

- Avobenzone (sometimes called Parsol 1789)
- Oxybenzone
- Mexoryl
- Titanium dioxide
- Zinc oxide

The Food and Drug Administration has suggested a label change that would rate UVA protection according to star system, with one being the lowest and four the highest.



About pricey sunscreens with fancy add-ons

Common additions include antioxidants such as green tea and vitamins A, C, and E. Antioxidants do block sun damage, but rubbing them on your skin hasn't been shown to have any effect.

UVA and UVB-blocking ingredients like titanium dioxide and zinc oxide are cheaper and known to be effective.

Slather it on!

Most people don't use enough sunscreen to get its full benefits. Apply about 1 ounce (2 tablespoons) every two hours. Use more if you are swimming or sweating.

Such terms as "continuous protection," "waterproof," and "sweatproof" are inaccurate.

Regardless of SPF number, look for:

- Water resistant – adheres while the user is in water for 40 minutes
- Very water resistant – adheres while the user is in water for 80 minutes

You can use the same sunscreen for the whole family

Formulas for adults and children are the same. There is no difference in active ingredients, although children's sunscreens are less likely to have allergens like PABA, which may cause skin reactions.

Finally

Don't believe any product labeled "safe tanning." Tanning is the skin's response to cell damage.

