



Sunscreens and Sun-safe Practices



Adequate sun protection, use of sunscreens and sun-safe practices are important. Excessive exposure to the sun increases the risk of skin cancers, pre-cancers and skin ageing. Some people have photosensitive disorders, where sun exposure aggravates their skin condition.

Who needs to use sunscreens?

Everyone, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. Adults and children above six months of age should use sunscreen daily. Babies below six months of age should be kept away from direct sunlight.

How do I choose a sunscreen?

A broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen of at least SPF 30 or higher, which can provide protection against UVA and UVB rays, is recommended.

Skincare products such as moisturisers and concealers with some SPF in them are not sufficient as standalone sunscreens, as the amount of product applied may not be enough to achieve the degree of sun protection stated. The only exception is the lips, which should be protected with a lip balm or lipstick containing sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher.

What does SPF stand for?

SPF stands for Sun Protection Factor. This is a measure of how well the sunscreen will protect the skin from UVB rays. For example, if your skin would normally burn after 10 minutes in the sun, applying an SPF 15 sunscreen allows you to stay in the sun without burning for approximately 150 minutes (a factor of 15x longer).

What are the different types of sunscreen ingredients?

Sunscreen ingredients can be broadly divided into

- **Physical blockers:** Includes minerals like titanium dioxide, zinc oxide – these block and scatter the UV rays before they penetrate the skin.

- **Chemical blockers:** Includes oxybenzone, avobenzone, octinoxate, among others – these absorb the UV rays.

Nowadays, many sunscreens use a combination of physical and chemical blockers. If you have sensitive skin, choose a sunscreen with physical blockers. Chemical blockers have a higher risk of contact allergy.

■ When do I use a sunscreen?

Everyday. One should apply a sunscreen at least 15 minutes before leaving the house. Reapply sunscreen every two hours or earlier, especially while swimming or if there is profuse sweating.

Consider using a sunscreen indoors, as typical home and office windows block most UVB rays but only a smaller portion of UVA rays. Installation of solar window films can block out the UVA rays.

■ How do I apply a sunscreen?

Apply enough sunscreen to cover all exposed skin. Most adults need about 1 ounce (or 30g) to fully cover their body. Do not forget the neck, ears and top of the head (for individuals with sparse hair).

■ Is spray-on sunscreen effective?

Spray-on sunscreens can be difficult to ascertain whether enough has been sprayed to achieve the level of sun protection stated for the product. When using spray-on sunscreen, ensure that an adequate amount is sprayed and then rubbed in for even coverage. Do not spray around or near the nose and mouth in order to avoid inhaling it.

■ What are the sun-safe practices I can adhere to?

- Avoid going out in the sun from 9.00am to 5.00pm. As a rule of thumb, if your shadow is shorter than you, you should be seeking shade.
- Avoid tanning beds and salons.

- Wear a wide-brimmed hat, use an opaque umbrella, sun-safe clothing and wear sunglasses when possible.
- Extra caution is needed near water, snow and sand, as the sun's rays may be reflected and can increase the risks of sunburn.
- Do not omit sunscreen on a cloudy day as majority of the sun's UV rays can hit your skin.

■ How do I balance sunscreen use and sun avoidance with having adequate vitamin D?

Evidence shows that optimal sunscreen use for daily and recreational photoprotection does not compromise vitamin D synthesis in healthy people. Sensible sun exposure before 9.00am and after 5.00pm, intake of foods rich in vitamin D and/or vitamin supplements help to ensure adequate vitamin D levels. Screening for vitamin D status and supplementation are recommended in patients with photosensitivity disorders.

Useful telephone number

Central Appointments

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