

We get a lot of questions this time of year about safe and effective sunscreens.

Many patients want to know more about what brands provide the best protection with the least amount of chemical

In this issue we'd like to dispel some myths about sunscreens and tell you about a great web resource to help you make the best decision for your family



## Sunscreens Four Surprising Facts You Need to Know

### 1. There's no consensus on whether sunscreens prevent skin cancer.

The Food and Drug Administration's 2007 draft sunscreen safety regulations say: "FDA is not aware of data demonstrating that sunscreen use alone helps prevent skin cancer" (FDA 2007). The International Agency for Research on Cancer agrees. IARC recommends clothing, hats and shade as primary barriers to UV radiation and writes that "sunscreens should not be the first choice for skin cancer prevention and should not be used as the sole agent for protection against the sun" (IARC 2001a).

### 2. There's some evidence that sunscreens might increase the risk of the deadliest form of skin cancer for some people.

Some researchers have detected an increased risk of melanoma among

sunscreen users. No one knows the cause, but scientists speculate that sunscreen users stay out in the sun longer and absorb more radiation overall, or that free radicals released as sunscreen chemicals break down in sunlight may play a role. One other hunch: Inferior sunscreens with poor UVA protection that have dominated the market for 30 years may have led to this surprising outcome.

### 3. There are more high SPF products than ever before, but no proof that they're better.

In 2007 the FDA published draft regulations that would prohibit companies from labeling sunscreens with an SPF higher than "SPF 50+." The agency wrote that higher values were "inherently misleading," given that "there is no assurance that the specific values themselves are in fact truthful..." (FDA 2007). Scientists are also worried that high-SPF products may tempt people to stay in the sun

too long, suppressing sunburns (a late, key warning of overexposure) while upping the risks of other kinds of skin damage.

### 4. Too little sun might be harmful, reducing the body's vitamin D levels.

Sunshine serves a critical function in the body that sunscreen appears to inhibit — production of vitamin D. The main source of vitamin D in the body is sunshine, and the compound is enormously important to health — it strengthens bones and the immune system, reduces the risk of various cancers (including breast, colon, kidney, and ovarian cancers) and regulates at least 1,000 different genes governing virtually every tissue in the body (Mead 2008). Over the last two decades, vitamin D levels in the U.S. population have been decreasing steadily, creating a "growing epidemic of vitamin D insufficiency" (Ginde 2009a).

# Choosing a Sunscreen

## Tips for better protection



**Don't be fooled by a label that boasts of high SPF** Anything higher than SPF 50+ can tempt you to stay in the sun too long, suppressing sunburn but not other kinds of skin damage. FDA says these numbers are misleading. Stick to SPF 15-50+, reapply often and pick a product based on your own skin, time planned outside, shade and cloud cover.

**News about Vitamin A.** Eating vitamin A-laden vegetables is good for you, but spreading vitamin A on the skin may not be. New

government data show that tumors and lesions develop sooner on skin coated with vitamin A-laced creams. Vitamin A, listed as "retinyl palmitate" on the ingredient label, is in 33 percent of sunscreens. Avoid them.

**Ingredients matter.** Avoid the sunscreen chemical oxybenzone, a synthetic estrogen that penetrates the skin and contaminates the body. Look for active ingredients zinc, titanium, avobenzone or Mexoryl SX. These substances protect skin from harmful UVA radiation and remain on the skin, with little if any penetrating into the body. Also, skip sunscreens with insect repellent – if you need bug spray, buy it separately and apply it first.

**Cream, spray or powder – and how often?** Sprays and powders cloud the air with tiny particles of sunscreen that may not be safe to breathe. Choose creams instead. Reapply them often, because sunscreen chemicals break apart in the sun, wash off and rub off on towels and clothing.

**Message for men: Wear sunscreen.** Surveys show that 34 percent of men wear sunscreen, compared to 78 percent of women. Start using it now to reduce your cumulative lifetime exposure to damaging UV radiation.

**Got your Vitamin D?** Many people don't get enough vitamin D, which skin manufactures in the presence of sunlight. Your doctor can test your level and recommend supplements or a few minutes of sun daily on your bare skin (without sunscreen).



	⊘ Avoid these	✓ Look for these
<b>Ingredients</b>	Oxybenzone Vitamin A (retinyl palmitate) Added insect repellent	Zinc Titanium dioxide Avobenzone or Mexoryl SX
<b>Products</b>	Sprays Powders SPF above 50+	Cream Broad-spectrum protection Water-resistant for beach, pool & exercise SPF 30+ for beach & pool

To compare your sunscreen for safety and effectiveness go to...

