Skin armor

Protecting your skin from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays prevents skin cancer and premature aging. Understanding the differences among sunscreens and practicing proper application can help you to enjoy the outdoors safely and protect your skin from the sun's harmful effects.

THE BASICS

- Look for sunscreens labeled "broad spectrum." This means they protect against both UVA and UVB rays. UVA rays contribute to aging, while UVB rays cause sunburn. Both increase skin cancer risk.
- Sun Protection Factor (SPF) indicates how well a sunscreen protects against UVB rays. Dermatologists generally recommend a minimum of SPF 30. Higher SPFs offer slightly more protection, but no sunscreen blocks 100% of UV rays.
- Sunscreens fall into two main categories: mineral and chemical. Mineral sunscreens, containing zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, create a physical barrier on the skin. Chemical sunscreens absorb UV rays.
- Apply sunscreen generously and evenly to all exposed skin 15 minutes before sun exposure. Reapply every two hours, or more often if swimming or sweating. Most people do not apply enough sunscreen. A shot glass full is the recommended amount for an adult.
- If you are swimming or sweating, choose water-resistant sunscreen. These are effective for a specified time (e.g., 40 or 80 minutes). Reapply after swimming or sweating, as directed.
- If you have oily skin, look for a gel or lotion labeled non-comedogenic to help avoid clogged pores.

PRO ADVICE

- Dermatologists generally recommend broad-spectrum sunscreens with an SPF of 30 or higher. Mineral sunscreens are often preferred for sensitive skin and children. Consistent and proper application is vital for optimal protection.
- Seek shade and limit sun exposure during peak hours.
- Perform a patch test when trying a new sunscreen, particularly if you have sensitive skin or a history of allergic reactions. Apply a small amount to a discreet skin area, like the inner forearm, and wait 24-48 hours to check for any redness or irritation.
- Wear sun-protective clothing, such as long-sleeved shirts, wide-brimmed hats, and UV-blocking sunglasses. These items provide an additional layer of defense against harmful UV rays and are especially useful during prolonged outdoor activities.

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