

Q. Why should I use sunscreen?

A. You need some sun for a healthy body. Your primary source of vitamin D is sunshine, which your skin converts into vitamin D. But the amount of time needed in the sun without sunscreen is minimal. Just 10 to 12 minutes of direct sunshine once or twice a day in the summer is all most people need. After that, it's time to cover up and use sunscreen to protect your skin from damage.

Using sunscreen is an effective way to protect your skin from sunburn, skin cancer, and premature skin aging. Sunscreen is necessary if you're going to be outside. And even if it's cloudy outside, you're still at risk for skin damage from the sun's ultraviolet rays. There are hundreds of sunscreen products to choose from. But new labeling requirements make it easier to choose the most protective option.

Read the label

Sunscreen products that protect against all types of the sun's harmful rays must be labeled **broad spectrum**. These sunscreens must have an SPF rating of 15 or higher and protect you from harmful UVA and UVB radiation from the sun. An SPF rating of less than 15 may help prevent sunburn. But it won't protect you from sun damage that can lead to cancer and other skin-related problems.

In addition, sunscreen labels can no longer include the words **waterproof**, **sweatproof** or **sunblock**. Instead, look for **water-resistant sunscreen** that tells you how long it will work in the water or while sweating. The label can only claim to be protective for 40 or 80 minutes, before more sunscreen is needed.



What is SPF?

SPF stands for "sun protection factor." It measures how much ultraviolet light gets to your skin. An SPF 15 rating means that if your skin reddens after 10 minutes in the sun, your skin would be protected 15 times as long, or 150 minutes. For the best protection, use a broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF rating higher than 15. The higher SPF, the better protection. But only to a point. No evidence exists that suggests an SPF higher than 50 provides any additional protection.

SPF 15 sunscreen blocks out about 93 percent of the sun's harmful rays. SPF 50 blocks out about 97 percent.

Be sun smart

Using sunscreen is an effective way to protect your skin from the sun when you're outside. Use it properly and be sun smart by:

- ✓ Applying sunscreen 30 minutes before sun exposure.
- ✓ Limiting time in the sun, especially between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when the sun's rays are the most intense.
- ✓ Wearing clothing to cover skin exposed to the sun. For example, long-sleeved shirts, pants, sunglasses, and broad-brimmed hats.
- ✓ Reapply sunscreen at least every two hours, more often if you're sweating or jumping in and out of the water.

Sources:

U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

American Cancer Society.

Harvard School of Public Health.

