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WELLNESS WEEKLY

Answers to Your Burning Questions on Sunscreen

You probably like to spend as much time outdoors as possible but you know that the sun can damage your skin and increase your risk of developing skin cancer. Though it's not the only safeguard you need to take, sunscreen is one of the easiest ways to protect your skin and is a good first line of defense.

Who should use sunscreen?

If you spend time outdoors during daylight hours, you need to use sunscreen. Also, children are especially susceptible to the harmful effects of the sun, so take extra steps to protect their skin and to prevent sunburns. Babies younger than 6 months should be kept out of direct sunlight because their skin is even more fragile.

What is an SPF?

All sunscreens products include an SPF, which stands for sun protection factor. The SPF number is a measurement of the amount of UV protection, the higher the number, the greater the protection. SPF is not an indication of how much time you can spend in the sun. The beneficial effects of sunscreen decreases over time, so remember to reapply depending on the amount of time spent in the sun.

What reduces the effectiveness of sunscreen?

How much protection your sunscreen offers depends on many factors, including how likely your skin is to burn (your skin type), the amount and type of sunscreen used, how often the sunscreen is applied and how intense the UV rays are. In addition, many factors can make sunscreen less effective, high humidity, sweating, drying or rubbing your skin with a towel and contact with water.

How much sunscreen is necessary, and how often should it be applied?

Most people use sunscreen too sparingly. A liberal application is 1 ounce to cover all exposed parts of the body. If you have a 4-ounce bottle, you'll be using about one-fourth of it for one application. To maximize protection, apply sunscreen liberally 30 minutes before going outdoors and reapply every two hours, or as needed.

Does sunscreen lose its strength from year to year?

Sunscreens are designed to remain stable and at original strength for up to three years. This means that you can use leftover sunscreen from one summer to the next. Keep in mind, however, that if you use sunscreen frequently and liberally, a bottle of sunscreen shouldn't last you that long.



Is sunscreen enough to protect your skin?

Though it offers some protection, no sunscreen blocks out all of the UV rays. Therefore, sunscreen shouldn't replace other protective measures, such as limiting the time you spend in the sun and covering your skin. For the most complete sun protection, use all three of these methods:

- Avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Because the sun's rays are strongest during these hours, try to schedule outdoor activities for other times of the day. Seek shade whenever possible.
- Cover up. Wear tightly woven clothing that covers your arms and legs and a broad-brimmed hat, which provides more protection than does a baseball cap or golf visor.
- Use sunscreen frequently and liberally. Use it even on cloudy or hazy days. UV rays can penetrate cloud cover.

