



SCOTT ELMQUIST

Although my family now teases me for being the “lady with the big hat” at the pool and beach, I haven’t always been so careful with sun protection. I must confess that as a teen and college student, I spent my summers working as a lifeguard, perfecting my tan with baby oil. Little did I know that I would one day educate others on the importance of sun protection.

Many of my patients getting ready for a week at the beach this August know that they need to use sunscreen, but assume that applying one with a high-

protection from UVB (sunburn/skin cancer) rays. Currently, manufacturers don’t measure protection against UVA (aging) rays. Therefore, depending on the ingredients, a sunscreen with an SPF of 60 may offer absolutely no protection against aging rays.

Additionally, the effectiveness of sunscreen depends on how well you apply it. The recommended application for an average adult is 1 ounce (2 tablespoons) for protection head to toe. This means that if you have an 8-ounce bottle of sunscreen in your beach bag for your family of four, and you all apply sunscreen every few hours, as is recommended, you should empty the bottle in one day. How many of us can say we’ve ever done that? (I admit, not me.)

Sunscreen Confidential

The truth about protecting your skin from the sun.

BY DR. MELISSA SCHWARZSCHILD

enough SPF provides all the protection they need. But there’s more to it than that.

The sun produces two main types of UV rays – UVB and UVA – both of which are damaging to the skin. UVB rays, the main cause of sunburns and skin cancers, are strongest during the summer months between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

UVA rays are the “aging rays,” penetrating more deeply into the skin and causing premature skin wrinkling, uneven pigmentation and poor skin texture. Unlike UVB rays, these rays are equally strong in winter and summer, and should be avoided throughout the day, including the early-morning and late-afternoon hours. Not only that, UVA rays penetrate cloud cover as well as car windows.

SPF, or sun protection factor, is a measurement of

To make sure you are protected from premature wrinkling as well as skin cancers, look for sunscreen with zinc oxide (my personal preference), titanium dioxide or avobenzone. Of the three substances, zinc oxide offers the broadest spectrum of protection, and the new micronized zinc won’t leave the white, pasty lifeguard look we all remember from our childhood. And new this year are avobenzone stabilizers (Helioplex or Mexoryl), enabling sunscreen to do its job for a much longer period of time.

The bottom line is that everyone needs to use sunscreen, every day, year-round. With that in mind, head off to the beach and have some fun in the sun.

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