

# SUNSCREEN: The Real Cover-up

**Do you know how to choose an effective sunscreen? To provide adequate sun protection, take a close look when shopping — new FDA labeling regulations are in effect for sunscreen products. Here are some common sunscreen questions, with answers provided by the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD).**

**What does sunscreen do?** Provided you use it correctly, sunscreen can lower your risk of sunburn, skin cancer and premature skin aging. Keep in mind, sunscreen is just 1 tool in preventing skin damage; you should also limit your exposure to harmful sun rays, and cover up with clothing and a wide-brimmed hat.

## **When do I need sunscreen?**

When you are going to be outside, even on cloudy days, apply sunscreen to all exposed skin that won't be covered up. Reapply about every 2 hours, and after swimming or sweating.

**How much do I need?** Apply 1 to 2 ounces for exposed skin 30 minutes before going outdoors. For your face, apply a dollop about the size of a half dollar every day, no matter what the weather.

**Are sunscreens safe?** There have been reports of health risks associated with some sunscreen ingredients, including

oxybenzone, retinyl palmitate and nanoparticle-size ingredients. However, the FDA and AAD support using sunscreen, finding no data showing toxic effects or risk of skin cancer with use.

## **What is the shelf life of sunscreen?**

Most sunscreens are effective for about 2 years. But if you're using it properly, a 4-ounce bottle, for example, should last about 4 applications.

## **Is sunscreen safe for sensitive skin?**

You may find products labeled for sensitive or 'babies' skin, but the FDA has not defined these terms for use in sunscreen. To learn which product ingredients are best avoided for sensitive or babies' skin, check with your health care provider or visit the AAD at [www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org).

## **Choosing Your Sunscreen**

The labels on sunscreens and any products containing sunscreen ingredients (e.g., makeup, moisturizers and lip balm) now list more information to ensure the products are effective when used properly. The AAD recommends you look for 3 key ingredients when shopping.

**1 Sun Protection Factor** (more commonly known as SPF) — While sunscreen products cannot filter out 100% of the sun's rays, various SPF levels can significantly filter out UVB rays, which cause sunburns.

**SPF 15 filters 93% of the sun's UVB rays.  
SPF 30 filters 97% of the sun's UVB rays.  
SPF 50 filters 98% of the sun's UVB rays.**

**Note:** The sunscreens with SPFs lower than 15 must include a warning: "Skin Cancer/Skin Aging Alert: Spending time in the sun increases your risk of skin cancer and early skin aging. This product has been shown only to help prevent sunburn, not skin cancer or early skin aging." The same warning must appear on sunscreens that are not broad-spectrum.

**2 Broad-spectrum** — This means the product is backed by testing to help protect against both harmful UVB (burning) rays and UVA (skin aging) rays. The combination can protect your skin from sunburn, skin cancer and early skin aging (premature age spots, wrinkles and sagging skin).

**3 Water-resistant** — Products using this label must specify how long (either 40 or 80 minutes) the sunscreen is effective while swimming or sweating (backed by testing). These claims are no longer used: waterproof, sweatproof and sunblock.

**Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF of at least 30.**

**Be sure to reapply it at least every 2 hours and after swimming or sweating. Cover up and seek shade to stay safe.**

