

EWG's Shopper's Guide to Safer Sunscreens

The sun's ultraviolet rays cause skin cancer. Protect yourself and your family with these 3 simple steps.

Quick Tips for Good Sunscreen

	🚫 Avoid these	✓ Look for these
Ingredients	Oxybenzone Vitamin A Added insect repellent	Zinc Titanium dioxide Avobenzone or Mexoryl SX
Products	Sprays Powders SPF above 50+	Cream Broad spectrum protection Water resistant for beach, pool & exercise SPF 30+ for beach & pool

Do these before applying sunscreen

The best defenses against getting too much harmful UV radiation are protective clothes, shade and timing. Here's a checklist:

Don't get burned. Red, sore, blistered then peeling skin is a clear sign you've gotten far too much sun. Sunburn raises skin cancer risk.

Wear clothes. Shirts, hats, shorts and pants shield your skin from the sun's UV rays – and don't coat your skin with goop. A long-sleeved surf shirt is a good start.

Find shade – or make it. Picnic under a tree, read beneath an umbrella, take a canopy to the beach. Keep infants in the shade – they lack tanning pigments (melanin) to protect their skin.

Plan around the sun. If you can, go out in early morning or late afternoon when the sun is lower. UV radiation peaks at midday.

Sunglasses are essential. Not just a fashion accessory, sunglasses protect your eyes from UV radiation, a cause of cataracts.



Now put on sunscreen

Some sunscreens prevent sunburn but not other types of skin damage. Make sure yours provides broad-spectrum protection.

Don't be fooled by high SPF. Anything higher than "SPF 50+" can tempt you to stay in the sun too long, suppressing sunburn but not other skin damage. FDA says these numbers are misleading. Stick to SPF 15-50+, reapply often and pick a product based on your own skin, time planned outside, shade and cloud cover.

News about Vitamin A. Eating vitamin A-laden vegetables is good for you, but spreading vitamin A on the skin may not be. New data show that tumors and lesions develop sooner on skin coated with vitamin A-laced creams. Vitamin A, listed as "retinyl palmitate" on ingredient labels, is in 41 percent of sunscreens. Avoid them.

Ingredients matter. Avoid the sunscreen chemical oxybenzone, a synthetic estrogen that penetrates skin and contaminates the body. Look for zinc, titanium, avobenzone or Mexoryl SX. These substances protect you from harmful UVA radiation and remain on the skin, with little if any penetration. Also, skip sunscreens containing insect repellent – if you need bug spray, buy it separately and apply it first.

Pick a good sunscreen. EWG's sunscreen database rates the safety and efficacy of about 1,400 products, including about 500 sunscreens for beach and sports. We give high ratings to brands that provide broad-spectrum, long-lasting protection with ingredients that pose fewer health concerns.

Cream, spray or powder – and how often? Sprays and powders cloud the air with tiny particles that may not be safe to breathe. Choose creams instead. Reapply them often, because sunscreen chemicals break apart in the sun, wash off and rub off.

Message for men: Wear sunscreens. Surveys show that 34 percent of men wear sunscreens, compared to 78 percent of women. Start now to reduce your cumulative lifetime exposure to UV radiation.

Got your Vitamin D? Many people don't get enough vitamin D, which skin manufactures in the presence of sunlight. Your doctor can test your level and recommend supplements or a few minutes of sun daily on your bare skin (without sunscreen).