

EWG's Guide to Safer Sunscreens

1. Quick tips for a good sunscreen.

Ingredients matter – learn if your brand leaves you overexposed to damaging UVA rays, if it breaks down in the sun, or if it contains potential hormone-disrupting compounds.

	Avoid These	Look for These
Ingredients	Oxybenzone Vitamin A (retinyl palmitate) 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

2. But first things first – do these before applying sunscreen.

The best defenses against getting too much harmful UV radiation are protective clothes, shade and timing. Check out the checklist:

Don't get burned. Red, sore, blistered (then peeling) skin is a clear sign you've gotten far too much sun. Sunburn increases skin cancer risk – keep your guard up!

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 to protect their skin.

Plan around the sun. If your schedule is flexible, go outdoors in early morning or late afternoon when the sun is lower in the sky.

UV radiation peaks at midday, when the sun is directly overhead.

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

3. Now put on sunscreen – here are the essentials, beyond the quick tips.

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

Don't be fooled by a label that boasts high SPF. Anything higher than "SPF 50+" can tempt you to stay in the sun too long, suppressing sunburn but not other kinds of skin damage. Stick to SPF 15-50+ and reapply often.

News about Vitamin A. New government data show that tumors and lesions develop sooner on skin coated with vitamin A-laced creams. Vitamin A, listed as "retinyl palmitate" on the ingredient label, is in 33 percent of sunscreens. Avoid them.

Ingredients matter. Avoid the sunscreen chemical oxybenzone, a synthetic estrogen that penetrates the skin and contaminates the body. Look for active ingredients zinc, titanium, avobenzone or Mexoryl SX. Also, skip sunscreens with 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 1,700 products with SPF. We give high ratings to brands that provide broad-spectrum, long-lasting protection with ingredients that pose fewer health concerns when the body absorbs them.

Cream, spray or powder – and how often? Sprays and powders cloud the air with tiny particles of sunscreen that may not be safe to breathe. Choose creams instead. Reapply them often.

4. Sun Safety Tips For Kids

Kids are more vulnerable to sun damage. A few blistering sunburns in childhood can double a person's lifetime chances of developing serious forms of skin cancer. The best sunscreen is a hat and shirt. After that, protect kids with a sunscreen that's effective and safe. Take these special precautions with infants and children:

Infants

Infants under 6 months should be kept out of direct sun as much as possible. So when you take your baby outside:

- **Cover up** – Use protective clothing, tightly woven but loose-fitting, and a sun hat.
- **Make shade** – Use the stroller's canopy or hood. If you can't sit in a shady spot, put up an umbrella.
- **Avoid midday sun** – Take walks in the early morning or late afternoon.
- **Follow product warnings for sunscreen on infants under 6 months old** – Most manufacturers advise against using sunscreens on infants or urge parents and caregivers to consult a doctor first. The American Academy of Pediatrics says that small amounts of sunscreen can be used on infants as a last resort.

Toddlers and Children

Sunscreen plays an essential part of any day in the sun. However, young children's skin is especially sensitive to chemical allergens as well as the sun's UV rays. When choosing a sunscreen, keep these tips in mind:

- **Test the sunscreen** by applying a small amount on the inside of your child's wrist the day before you plan to use it. If an irritation or rash develops, try another product or ask your child's doctor.

- **Slop on sunscreen** and reapply often, especially if your child is playing in the water or sweating a lot.
- **Choose your own sunscreen for daycare and school.** Some childcare facilities provide sunscreen for the kids, but you can bring your own.

Sun Safety at School

Many schools treat sunscreen as a medicine and require the child have written permission to use it. Some insist that the school nurse apply it. Other schools ban hats and sunglasses on campus. Here are a few questions to ask your school:

- What is the policy on sun safety?
- Is there shade on the playground?
- Are outdoor activities scheduled to avoid midday sun?

Teens

Teenagers coveting bronzed skin are likely to sunbathe, patronize tanning salons or buy self-tanning products. Not good ideas. Tanning parlors expose the skin to as much as **15 times the UV radiation of the sun**. Many chemicals in self-tanning products have not been tested for safety.

Tan does not mean healthy. Here are a few more tips for teens:

- **Make sunscreen a habit** for every outdoor sport and activity.
- **Find sun-protective clothing, hats, and sunglasses** that you like to wear.
- **To parents of teens: Be good role models** – let your teen see you protecting yourself from the sun.