Sunscreen

Sunscreen mistakes

Not knowing what SPF means: SPF is a multiplier that describes how much time a sunscreen allows a person to spend in the sun before getting burned by UVB rays. A product with an SPF of 15, the minimum doctors advise, lets you stay in the sun 15 times longer. The SPF says nothing about how well a sunscreen protects against UVA light.

Not knowing what ingredients to look for: Among US approved sunscreen ingredients, many protect against UVB light; benzenes (like dioxybenzone and oxybenzone), for example, and the cinnamates (like octyl mehtoxycinnamate). But only one, avobenzone (Parsol 1789) specifically absorbs UVA light. The sunblocks zinc oxide and titanium dioxide reflect UVA & UVB light. But products that combine avobenzone with zinc oxide, titanium dioxide or one of the ingredients that absorb UVB light are even better (like Blue Lizard).

Skimping: To get the SPF advertised on a bottle take a full teaspoon slathered on the face and enough to fill a shot glass rubbed over the body. Yet people typically apply only 20 – 60% of that a 2002 study found. The ears, the neck, the hands, the feet and even bald patches on top of the head are commonly missed sites.

Applying it too late: Most sunscreens take 15 – 30 minutes to start working because they have to be absorbed by the skin first. If you put the sunscreen on when you're already on the beach you're not getting the protection.

Not Reapplying : There's no such thing as all-day protection because the active ingredients in sunscreen degrade in the sun after 2-4 hours.

Not wearing it daily: Many people remember to wear sunscreen only at the beach. But the subtle everyday exposure to UV light can add up to wrinkling or skin cancer.

Continuing to use old products: Most sunscreens have a shelf life of 3 years. (If you are keeping your product around that long, you are probably not using enough or frequently enough.) Products lose their potency even faster if bottles are left out in the sun or stashed in a hot car, where light and heat can degrade them.

Not taking medications into account: Antibiotics such as tetracycline can make the skin more photosensitive, leaving it more vulnerable to UV damage. Also, thiazide diuretics, and drugs included in some blood pressure medicines.