

The Arizona Skinny: Your Skin from A to Z

Sun Protection

With all the marketing and hype surrounding skin care products and sunscreens, it can be tough to know what to believe. However, these things about the sun are true: the sun's ultraviolet light causes skin cancer and premature aging of the skin. In the United States, it is estimated that there were over 3.5 million non-melanoma skin cancers diagnosed and treated during 2009. Also, melanoma rates continue to climb every year by about 3%, and melanoma is the number one cancer killer of young women between the ages of 25 and 29. So, where do we begin to protect ourselves? Sunscreen!

Sunscreens come in 2 basic categories: physical agents and chemical ingredients. The chemical-based sunscreens are those most commonly available, and in general have up to now been thought to go on the skin easiest. The main issue with these chemical-based sunscreens is that the sun degrades them after about 2 hours, so at that point we really don't have much protection left. Some sunscreens like Neutrogena and Aveeno have added ingredients to many of their products that stabilize those chemicals, so that they last up to 5 hours, which is a tremendous improvement. In order to get all day protection though, it is critical to reapply those sunscreens.

The physical-based sunscreens contain one or both of the following ingredients: zinc oxide, and titanium dioxide. Now, when mentioning zinc oxide, most people picture a surfer wearing a white stripe across his nose and cheeks. Zinc oxide has come a long way, now available in surface coated micronized and ultrafine formulations, so that this inorganic product does not lose its ability to protect us over the hours, and the skin does not have that ghostly glow after applying it. Of course, if the skin becomes wet or sweaty, sunscreens should be reapplied.

The places to target each and every day are the face, ears (front and back), neck (front and back), upper chest, and the backs of the hands. These are the most common locations we see skin cancer. Consistency is the key, and healthy skin habits include a daily dose of sunscreen. Try putting it next to the toothbrush; just as we should brush our teeth each morning, we should put on some sunscreen every day, too. Keep in mind that the low level chronic exposure accumulates over the years to damage and age the skin. Also, some of the UV light that our eyes do not even see, is able to pass through glass; much of the daily damage happens while driving or riding in a car. In the United States, more sun damage occurs on the left side of the body, while people living in Australia see more on the right.

Finally, look for sunscreens that have a sun protection factor of 30 or higher. Those with an SPF much beyond 50 do not add much, and if anything may give people a false sense of security. Water and sweat resistant formulas are available for outdoor activities or sunny beach vacations. Whatever your morning routine, simply apply the sunscreen last, just before any make-up products (for those who wear make-up).

So, to have healthy skin during the summer months and all year long, follow these simple tips:
-Find a sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher, but do not waste your time or money any those much higher than 50

- For those with more sensitive skin, chemical free options are available, such as Blue Lizard, Vanicream, and EltaMD
- Use sunscreen daily on exposed skin, and reapply as needed
- Use protective clothing like broad-brimmed hats and sun protective long-sleeved shirts to your advantage

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