

## Sun Safety Tips

After months of hibernation, sun-starved Canadians flock to the outdoors. Whether you are enjoying the weather on a patio, at the cottage, or having fun on the beach, it is finally time to soak up some sun. However, for many of us this can result in the dreaded sunburn and long-term sun damage, if we don't take the proper precautions.



### But what about vitamin D?

It is true that summer is the prime season to get some much needed vitamin D from sunlight. However, recommendations for sun exposure needed for adequate vitamin D range anywhere from 10-15 minutes of midday sun exposure twice a week, up to six times that amount. This depends on many factors like skin colour, age, and amount of body fat. Baking on the beach for hours at a time is probably not the best way to stock up on this vitamin.

### Everyday sun safety tips

- **Wear clothes.** An obvious tip, yet not many people cover up on the beach when they are not in the water. The amount of sun protection depends on the type of weave. If you're looking for serious sun protection for long periods of time outdoors, look for UV resistant clothing that has a tight weave.
- **Wear sunglasses.** They protect your eyes from UV damage that can cause cataracts.
- **Find shade.** Yet another reason why we should love our trees more. No shade at the beach or park? Bring your own sun umbrella or canopy.
- **Plan to go outdoors outside of peak UV hours.** The early morning or late afternoon is when the sun is lower in the sky. UV radiation peaks at midday.
- **Wear sunscreen,** if you plan on spending long periods of time out in the sun.

### To consider when choosing a sunscreen

#### **Choose a product with SPF 15-50**

Sunscreens with an SPF higher than 30 have not been shown to dramatically increase effectiveness of sun protection. Furthermore, those who apply a sunscreen with a higher SPF may use less sunscreen as a result.

#### **Avoid chemical sunscreens**

How chemical sunscreens work is that they absorb UVA and /or UVB rays before they have a chance to damage the skin. As these chemicals absorb UV rays they breakdown. The issue is that many of these chemicals are have inferior stability, produce free radicals when broken down, penetrate the skin, may be hormone disruptors, and may be carcinogenic. Furthermore, depending on which chemicals are used the product, it may not even block out UVA rays, which are the type that is associated with wrinkles, sun damage, and cancer.

Some active ingredients to avoid: *oxybenzone, PABA, padimate –O, octinoxate, homosalate, enzulizole*

### Best to use a physical sunblock

Physical sunblocks work by reflecting UVA and/or UVB rays before they have a chance to damage the skin. They sit on top of the skin rather than being absorbed. They tend to be more stable and are tolerated better than chemical sunscreens, especially by those with sensitive skin. Because they are stable, these types of sunblocks require less frequent applications.

Active ingredients to look for: *zinc oxide, titanium dioxide*

### Use creams. Avoid sprays and powders

Sprays and powders can cloud the air with tiny particles of the active ingredient. Whether it is a chemical or physical sunscreen, these particulates are probably not safe to breathe.

### Never use DEET and sunscreen at the same time

DEET is a chemical found in most commercial insect repellants. It is known to be a neurotoxin. Sunscreen actually facilitates the absorption of DEET into the bloodstream by a factor of three.

Best to avoid DEET altogether. Some natural alternatives include sprays, creams, or patches that contain citronella, garlic, or neem.

### Other ingredients to avoid

The following are non-active ingredients that may be found in sunscreens, and are best to avoid, if possible:

- **Parabens** (ex. Methylparaben, ethylparaben). These preservatives found in many cosmetics may mimic the actions of estrogens.
- **Petrolatum** (ex. Mineral oil). This is made from crude oil and is non-breathable for the skin.
- **Phtalates**. These are compounds found in plastics and cosmetics, and can be a hormone disruptor. They are usually labeled as "fragrance".

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) based in New York tested 500 beach and sport sunscreens and only 39 passed their criteria. To check out their list of the Best Top Ten Sunscreens for 2010 based on safety and effectiveness go to this website: <http://www.ewg.org/2010sunscreen/>

So as long as you're smart about your sun exposure, go out there and enjoy the beautiful weather!

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