

Layer up for skin protection

May is skin cancer awareness month. It is also the beginning of warm weather when we tend to spend more time outdoors. So, it's a good time to make sure you are effectively protecting your skin. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the best way to protect your skin from sun damage is to use a layered approach. Layering sunscreen with protective clothing, a hat and sunglasses will maximize your protection. Continue reading to learn the best ways to do each of these.

Protecting your skin when outside is as important as ever. In fact, the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays can damage your skin in as little as 15 minutes. The CDC recommends the following:

First layer: Sunscreen. Most people know it is important to use sunscreen, but many do not know the proper way to use it.

- Use the right sunscreen with the right amount and type of protection. Be sure your sunscreen has a broad spectrum SPF. This means it blocks both UVA and UVB rays. Also, be certain to use a strong enough SPF that will protect you for as long as you need. All sunscreens have a sun protection factor (SPF) number. SPF refers to how long a person will be protected from burning. For instance, SPF 15 means a person can stay in the sun 15-times longer before burning than they could without protection. SPF only refers to UVB protection. Higher numbers indicate longer protection. Use at least SPF 15.
- Use sunscreen the right way. 1) Use enough (at least 1 oz. – or about a shot glass full); 2) Apply it at least 15 – 20 minutes ahead of time. Understanding how sunscreen works helps us appreciate why we need to apply it as directed. Most sunscreen products work by absorbing, reflecting, or scattering sunlight. They contain chemicals that interact with the skin to protect it from UV rays. That's why sometimes you need to apply sunscreen at least 20 minutes before going outside. This gives the sunscreen a chance to get down to the layers of skin where it works best.
- Use sunscreen whenever you are going to be outside – even if it's cold or shady.
- Don't forget hard to reach places: The back of your neck, ears and other hard to reach places can be damaged by the sun. Get help applying in these areas if you cannot reach them yourself.

- Reapply as needed. Many people think that if you put sunscreen on in the morning it will last all day. This is not true. You need to reapply every two hours. Also, reapply if you have been swimming, sweating, or toweling off, since your sunscreen will have been eliminated. Consider wearing a rash guard (a short- or long-sleeved shirt designed for water wear) if you will be going in and out of the water a lot.
- Check the expiration date. Sunscreen loses its effectiveness over time. If your sunscreen doesn't have an expiration date, throw it away after three years – sooner if it has been exposed to high temperatures (such as leaving it in your car trunk).
- What if you don't like to use sunscreen: Some find sunscreen to be uncomfortable, and resist using it. The good news is that there are many different sunscreen products available. You can even get makeup, lip balm and moisturizers that contain SPF – just be sure you choose products that have at least SPF 15 protection. Not all products have the same ingredients; if your skin reacts badly to one product, or you simply don't like how it feels, try another one.

Layer two: Clothing. Sunscreen works best when combined with other options to prevent UV damage. Clothing is a great second layer. Here are some tips:

- Cover-up. Wear long sleeves and long pants when possible. Wear clothing made of lightweight fabrics to stay comfortable and cool. Tightly woven fabrics offer the best protection.
- Keep it dry: Dry fabric offers more protection than wet.
- Look for clothing designed with sun protection: When shopping look for the UPF (Ultraviolet Protection Factor). UPF correlates to SPF in skincare products. UPFs range from 15 (good) - 50 or higher (excellent).
- Top it off: A hat will help protect your face, ears, neck and scalp. A hat with a brim all the way around will protect your face, ears, and the back of your neck. Tightly woven fabrics offer the best protection. Avoid straw hats or hats with holes that let sunlight through. If you wear a baseball cap, be sure to protect your ears and the back of your neck by using a broad-spectrum sunscreen with at least SPF 15, or wearing clothing that covers those areas.

Layer three: Sunglasses.

Long-term sun exposure greatly increases your chances of developing cataracts as you age. Sunglasses protect your eyes from UV rays and reduce the risk of cataracts. They also protect the tender skin around your eyes from sun exposure.

As with skin care products, look for sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB rays. Consider wrap-around sunglasses since they block UV rays from sneaking in from the side.

Shade is your friend.

Even if you are protecting your skin with sunscreen, clothing and sunglasses, it is still wise to limit your sun exposure. Seek shade under an umbrella, tree, or other shelter when you can. Also, limit your time in the sun between 10 am and 2 pm, when the sun's rays are the strongest.

For more info:

- https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/sun-safety.htm?s_cid=govD_CancerNews2018-05-03_01
- <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-116/>
- <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/sun-protection.html>