



SUNSCREEN GUIDELINES TO HELP KEEP YOUR SKIN PROTECTED

School is out and summer vacation is well underway. This means people will be spending more time in the great outdoors. Wearing sunscreen is one way to protect yourself from sun exposure. There are so many different kinds available, and what do those numbers really mean?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration regulates sunscreen to ensure they meet safety and effectiveness standards. As an FDA-regulated product, sunscreens must pass certain tests before they are sold.

How you use this product, along with other protective measures you take, makes a difference in how well you are able to protect yourself and your family from overexposure to the sun, said Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension housing and consumer specialist.

“Sunscreen is an effective tool we have to help keep our skin protected.” Peek said.

To help cut down on the risk of exposure, use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with at least a sun protective value of 15 or higher. For those who are fair skinned, choose a product with an SPF of 30 to 50. The SPF value indicates how long it would take to redden skin as compared to without using sunscreen. The Skin Cancer Foundation indicates SPF of 15 or higher are necessary for adequate everyday protection. For more extended or intense sun exposure, the Foundation recommends SPF of 30 or higher. You can get more detailed information at <https://www.skincancer.org/prevention/uva-and-uvb>.

“The sun is stronger in the middle of the day compared to early morning and early evening hours. Your risk of sunburn is higher at mid-day,” she said. “Solar intensity also is related to geographic location.”

In addition to knowing what SPF you need, be sure to read the directions on the package for correct application procedures, as well as how often to apply the sunscreen. Sunscreen comes in different forms, including lotions, creams, sticks, gels, butters and sprays. The directions for using sunscreen products can vary according to their forms. Be sure to read application directions.

“Remember to apply sunscreen to your ears, nose, lips, back of your neck, hands and the tops of your feet,” she said. “Also, use it along the hairline, as well as areas of the head that are exposed by balding or thinning hair.”

Typically, you need to reapply at least every two hours, and more often if you will be in and out of the water.

Something else to look for would be the words broad spectrum on the label. There are two types of UV radiation you need to protect yourself from – UVA and UVB. Sunscreen that is labeled broad spectrum provides protection from both by absorbing or reflecting UV radiation before it can damage the skin.

Peek said oftentimes people have sunscreen leftover from the previous year. It is a good idea to check the label for an expiration date. Expired sunscreen should be thrown away because there is no assurance it is still effective.

In addition to using sunscreen appropriately, there are other sun-protective measures that can be taken. Wear lightweight, light-colored long-sleeved shirts, pants, sunglasses and wide-brimmed hats to minimize exposure to the sun. Consumers may think long sleeves during the summer would be uncomfortably warm, but by choosing a light-weight material, it can be quite comfortable.

“Families will be spending a lot of time together this summer, whether in the backyard, at the pool, hiking or a variety of other activities,” Peek said. “Using sunscreen properly is just one way to help keep your family safe on all of their adventures.”



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