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How to choose sunscreens?

Ultraviolet (UV) light is categorized into 3 types according to its wavelength:

UVA (320-400nm): This is the main type of UV light that reaches the Earth. It is present all day long, and can transmit through glasses and clothes to penetrate deep into the dermis, causing photoaging, sunburns and skin cancers.

UVB (290-320nm): This is the main culprit for causing sunburns, and can damage the skin and cause photoaging or skin cancer. The UVB is the strongest from 10am to 4pm

UVC (270-290nm): It does not reach the surface of the Earth, since it is mostly absorbed by the ozone layer.

Sun protection factor (SPF): This is a system of measuring protection against UVB. For example, if you use a sunscreen with an SPF of 30, it will take 30 times longer to produce redness on your sun-exposed skin, compared to unprotected skin.

Before going outdoors, it is recommended to apply “broad-spectrum” (protecting against both UVA and UVB) sunscreen with SPF of at least 30. Sunscreen is best applied 15-30 minutes before sun exposure, and also reapplied a second time 15-30 minutes after sun exposure, as well as after swimming or sweating to give full protection.

Be generous when using sunscreens: an adult needs approximately 30g for each application. Sunscreens should not be used in infants under 6 months; try to use umbrellas, hats, and clothes to help protect against the sun. If an insect repellent is to be used, one should apply sunscreen first and ensure it's well absorbed before spraying repellents such as DEET.



Some medications may make the skin more sensitive to UVA light (photosensitivity), for example, tetracyclines and sulfonamides (eg. hydrochlorothiazide). If you are currently on a medication that may make your skin photosensitive, it is advised to choose a sunscreen product that is broad-spectrum, as it is not enough to just look at the SPF!

1. **Kleiman, N. Prevention and Treatment of Sun-Induced Skin Damage. Patient Self-Care, 2nd ed. Nov. 2012.**