

How to: Avoid Sunburns

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Slathering on the sunscreen has become an annual rite of summer — especially in beach-loving Hampton Roads. Yet despite annual sales of more than \$1.1 billion, the tidal wave of sun protection products manufactured since FDA approval in 1978 hasn't cured the problem. America's skin cancer rate holds steady at about 1 million cases a year, and it's rising among young white women.

A recent study by a cosmetics industry watchdog group may hold part of the answer. Analyzing 952 brand-name sunscreens, the nonprofit Environmental Working Group found that only 15 percent offered "very good" protection from both UVB and UVA radiation, remained stable in sunlight and posed few if any known or suspected hazards. In plain language, 4 out of 5 failed its tests — with leading brands among the worst offenders.

Still, sunscreens can provide important protection against skin cancer and premature aging if carefully chosen and properly used. Here's how to do it:

- Read the label. Look for a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 30. Then make sure the sunscreen contains at least 7 percent zinc oxide or titanium oxide. These physical blocking agents not only last longer than other ingredients but also shut out both UVA rays, which have been linked to both premature aging and skin cancer, and the burning, cancer-causing UVB rays that are the sole focus of many lesser sunscreens.
- Slop early and often. Sunscreen should be applied at least 20 minutes before going outside, then re-applied every 2 hours. Don't skimp on the sauce: You need a full ounce — or about a shot-glass worth — to do the job.
- Get some help. Sunscreens shouldn't be your only line of defense. Wear a hat, UV sunglasses and a shirt for full protection.
- Don't push it. Even the best sunscreens don't give you a license to bask in the sun. Avoid the sun's strongest and most damaging rays, which peak between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Sources: National Cancer Institute, Environmental Working Group, WebMd