

Why Sunscreen Should be Your Daily Companion *by Mariel Bird, DO*

As the weather warms up it's important to remember to protect your skin from the sun! Here are the answers to the most common questions patients ask Dr. Bird, Thunderbird IM's Board Certified Dermatologist, about sunscreen:

Who should wear sunscreen?

Everyone! Ultraviolet (UV) rays produced by the sun are a known risk factor for skin cancer. Whether from accumulation of small amounts of UV over a lifetime or from sunburns, these harmful rays can produce skin cancer in any race or gender. Sunburns experienced as a child can affect your chances of developing skin cancer as an adult and it can be applied as early as age 6 months.

What sunscreen should I buy? The three most important things to look for in a sunscreen are:

- *Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 30*
- *Broad-Spectrum Coverage (protects against UVA and UVB, the two types of UV rays that can damage skin)*
- *Water Resistant (effective for up to 40 minutes in water) or Very Water Resistant (effective for up to 80 minutes in water)*

How much do I need to apply? One ounce (a shot glass) is the amount needed to cover the body of an average person. Adjust based on the amount of skin exposed and your size.

How often should I apply it?

Sunscreen should be reapplied every few hours if out in the direct sun. The sunscreen you applied in the morning will not still protect you on your drive home from work. The sun's rays are the most intense in the late afternoon hours, especially in Arizona! Keeping a small travel size sunscreen in your car/purse/briefcase can allow you to reapply to your face and hands.

But I heard sunscreen is toxic – Is it safe? Yes! No published studies show that the chemical ingredients used in sunscreens, such as Oxybenzone pose a human health risk. However, if you're nervous, choose sunblock (aka physical or mineral sunscreen), which relies on Titanium dioxide or Zinc oxide, rather than sunscreen.

Don't I need the sun to make

Vitamin D? It only takes minutes of sun exposure for the body to produce Vitamin D, and because sunscreen doesn't protect you 100% from UV (an SPF 30 guards against 97%) there is no need to worry about lacking in this important vitamin. If you want more vitamin D, you can obtain all you need from your diet! Drink vitamin D-fortified orange juice or milk, eat salmon and other fatty fish, or take a daily multivitamin containing 600 units of vitamin D.

Dr. Bird's Sun Protection Tips:

- Sunscreen is not the only way to protect your skin. Wear protective clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses, when possible.
- Limit time in the midday sun. The sun's UV rays are the strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. To the extent possible, limit exposure to the sun during these hours. If you must be outside – seek shade!
- Use extra caution near water and sand as they reflect the damaging rays of the sun, which can increase your chance of sunburn.
- Avoid tanning beds. Sunless tanners are a great alternative, but you still need to use sunscreen when using.
- As always, if you notice a changing, itching or bleeding spot or lesion on your skin, see a board-certified dermatologist. Skin cancer is very treatable when caught early.

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