

## **SUNSCREENS**

Sunscreen is an important sun protection measure for use in conjunction with other ultraviolet (UV) radiation protection measures. These include:

- Wearing tightly woven clothing that covers arms, body and legs
- A broad-brimmed or legionnaire-style hat that protects your face, head, neck and ears
- Seeking shade wherever possible
- Avoiding outdoor activities during peak UV periods
- Applying SPF30+ sunscreen to skin that cannot be covered with clothing, and reapplying every two hours
- Sliding on some sunglasses that meet Australian Standards

### **Why should I wear a sunscreen?**

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation can cause skin damage, ageing, wrinkling, sunburn and skin cancer. Sunscreen can effectively block most UV radiation reaching your skin, but should be used with sunglasses, clothing, hats and shade.

### **How do sunscreens work?**

Sunscreen filters most of the UV radiation from reaching your skin in one of two ways:

**Chemical barrier** – sunscreen absorbs part or all of the UV radiation. This is the most common sunscreen and is useful for most areas of the body. It usually contains octyl methoxycinnamate, methylbenzylidene camphor and zinc oxide.

**Physical barrier** – sunscreens may reflect or scatter part or all of the UV radiation away from your skin. Only use these on small areas of skin because they may prevent normal heat loss and perspiration. Usual ingredients are zinc dioxide and titanium dioxide.

Most sunscreens contain a combination of chemical ingredients and some contain both chemical and physical elements to increase their protective value.

### **What is in a sunscreen?**

Sunscreens have chemicals that either absorb or scatter UV radiation. Most sunscreens use cinnamates, salicylates or dibenzomethanes. Water-resistant sunscreens usually contain polymers to bind sunscreen to the skin. Sunscreens come in cream, lotion or gel.

All sunscreen products sold in Australia are approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration as safe and effective. However, not all sunscreens contain the same ingredients so if your skin reacts to one sunscreen, talk to a chemist or doctor about choosing another with different chemicals.

There is no data on the long-term effects of every day sunscreen use yet, but unprotected sun exposure poses a serious health risk.

### **What do SPF numbers mean?**

SPF stands for Sun Protection Factor. This is a laboratory measure that grades the ability of a sunscreen to filter out UV radiation. Products rated SPF30+ provide maximum protection, as they filter out 96% of UV radiation. No sunscreen product filters 100% of UV radiation.

Australian sunscreens are only labelled up to SPF30+ (not higher as in some overseas countries) because Australian authorities are only satisfied that testing practices can reliably measure up to this level.

The SPF number is only a guide to its relative strength. How long it takes for your skin to burn depends on time of day, time of year, amount of reflection, cloudiness and your skin type.

### **What does broad-spectrum mean?**

All sunscreens with a SPF number will filter out the UVB part of the ultraviolet radiation. Those labelled broad-spectrum will filter out UVA as well as the UVB rays that cause skin cancer. We recommend a broad-spectrum sunscreen.

### **How should I apply sunscreen?**

Apply sunscreens liberally to achieve the SPF claimed on the label. We recommend one teaspoonful for the face, neck and ears and one teaspoonful for each arm or leg. You should apply SPF30+ sunscreen 20 minutes before going outside and then reapply every two hours. If swimming or perspiring, apply sunscreen more often.

### **Where should I buy sunscreen?**

Chemists, supermarkets and department stores sell sunscreens. Supermarkets are usually cheaper but have restricted choice. Chemist shops may be more expensive but usually have a wider range, and chemist staff can give advice on sunscreens that suit your needs. The Cancer Council Tasmania sells sunscreens and sun protection products at our Cancer Support Centres.

### **Do I need to buy an expensive sunscreen?**

No. Price does not always indicate quality. You simply need a broad-spectrum, SPF30+ sunscreen. All sunscreens with a SPF30+ rating give good protection when applied correctly.

### **What is the shelf life of sunscreen?**

Most sunscreens will last about two or three years and should be stored at a temperature less than 25°C. If you leave a sunscreen in excessive heat (eg in the glove box of a hot car or in the sun at the beach) the product may deteriorate. Try keeping it with the drinks. All sunscreens include an expiry date.

Other sun protection brochures available from your local Cancer Support Centre include: *Sunglasses*; *Skin cancer facts and stats*; *Children and the sun*; and *Solariums*.

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#### **CANCER SUPPORT CENTRES**

180-4 Collins Street	HOBART
5/ 216 Charles Street	LAUNCESTON
103 Oldaker Street	DEVONPORT
54 Cattley Street	BURNIE

CANCER COUNCIL HELPLINE **13 11 20** or email [helpline@cancertas.org.au](mailto:helpline@cancertas.org.au)  
[www.cancertas.org.au](http://www.cancertas.org.au)