

# The York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

Summertime is officially here and it's easy to feel that you're wasting it, bathing under the florescent lights at the office. Who doesn't want to be outside sunbathing, swimming, playing catch on the beach or just barbequing in the backyard? While summer means fun in the sun, make sure you are not getting too much of a good thing. Sunburn is not only an unattractive red inconvenience - the painful symptoms are your body's attempts to try to repair the damage caused by the sun's UV rays. By now, you probably know that you should use sunscreen everyday both to help reduce your risk of skin cancer and prevent pesky wrinkles, dark spots and other signs of premature aging. Yet even those of us that lather it on religiously make potentially dangerous mistakes. You can help protect yourself by taking a few simple precautions.

How many times have you been at the beach and you've seen people spread out their blanket, strip down to their swimsuit and then start slathering away? Always apply sunscreen first. Apply it to clean skin, and allow it to penetrate for at least 20 minutes before sun exposure. That way, it has time to get absorbed and start working - and so you don't get UV exposure for the first few minutes when your skin is extremely vulnerable.

It's not just a marketing gimmick: There is a difference between face and body specific sunscreens. For body sunscreen, Using a cream, oil or lotion is a matter of personal choice, but keep in mind that most oils do not contain sufficient amounts of sunscreen and usually have an SPF of less than 2. The skin on the face is more delicate and is exposed to the damaging effects of the elements, including the sun, more than the rest of your body. The face, neck and hands are the most vulnerable areas, and where you will first begin to see the signs of ageing. Facial sunscreens are specially formulated to protect the delicate skin on your face from the signs of sun-induced ageing. If you are acne prone or sensitive you should avoid the body versions on

your face all together. Regular sunscreen is usually thicker and therefore can clog pores. The dry touch sprays are full of alcohol, which is very drying and irritating to both the face and eyes.

There are usually two types of people when it comes to when to replace sunscreen. One believes that it needs to be replaced each year to be effective, while the other keeps bottles until the last little bit is used no matter how long that may be. Both are wrong. A sunscreen's effectiveness lasts about three years after the bottle is opened. You don't need to throw away all your sunscreen at the end of the season, but those bottles which have been around for a few seasons probably need to be discarded. However if you are applying enough sunscreen you should never have to worry about an expiry date.



Oh the question... Waterproof or not waterproof? The truth is most sunscreens work out of the water, but most easily wash off in the water. And no sunscreen is truly waterproof, or will last for more than a few hours without reapplication. They also require a drying time to be water resistant before you enter the water. New labeling laws now prevent sunscreen companies from using the words "waterproof", and "sweat-proof". They will be able to say "water-resistant", and will specify if they are water resistant for 40 or 80 minutes. They cannot claim "instant protection" or protection for more than two hours without reapplication. Remember to read your product's instructions and re-apply as required.

In recent years, manufacturers have unleashed an extraordinary range of products to the public. Often at extraordinary prices. Some say they last for eight hours and are completely water resistant. Others boast that you can stay out in direct sunlight fifty times longer than normal without burning. According to skin experts many of these products are a waste of time and money. When it comes to exercising, there's strength in numbers, but that's not necessarily true about sunscreen. This SPF system is extremely misleading to the average consumer and it's hard to know what to make of SPF inflation without first going into how the system works. SPF, or Sun Protection Factor, is a measure of how well a sunscreen will protect your skin from the sun's UVB rays which cause sunburns, but not UVA rays, which are linked to skin damage. The number that makes up the SPF rating is based on a ratio. If your skin would normally burn after 10 minutes in the sun, applying an SPF 15 sunscreen would allow you to stay in the sun without burning for approximately 150 minutes (a factor of 15 times longer) This is a rough estimate depending on skin type, intensity of sunlight and amount of sunscreen used. Based on this logic, someone using SPF 100 should be protected for more than 24 hours. But there are problems with the SPF model: First, dermatologists strongly suggest that no sunscreen, regardless of strength, should be expected to stay effective longer than two hours without reapplication. Secondly, SPF refers only to the sunscreens ability to block out UVB rays and not UVA rays. Therefore the number doesn't indicate how long a person can be outside in the sun before suffering serious skin damage. Some experts worry that the higher SPF leads to a false sense of security about staying in the sun longer without reapplying.

Dermatologists also suggest that rather than becoming obsessed about the SPF number, it's more important to choose a broad spectrum sunscreen. To make sure you're getting effective UVA as well as UVB coverage, look for a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher, plus some combination of the following UVA-screening ingredients: stabilized avobenzene, ecamsule (a.k.a. Mexoryl™), oxybenzone, titanium

dioxide, and zinc oxide. You may see the phrases multi spectrum, broad spectrum or UVA/UVB protection on sunscreen labels, and these all indicate that some UVA protection is provided. Also focus on making sure you are wearing enough. Conveniently, a full shot glass should do the trick.

Unfortunately, sunscreen can't completely prevent sunburns, and skin cancer. But you can give your skin some added protection by wearing:

- Lip balm with SPF 30 or higher.
- A tightly woven hat with a wide brim.
- Wrap-around sunglasses with UV protection.
- A tightly woven, dark long-sleeved shirt or special sun-protective clothing.

You also can protect your skin by seeking shade from the sun between the hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. That's when the sun's harmful UV rays are strongest.

Remember, no sunscreen provides 100% protection from the sun. But by taking these added precautions, choosing a broad spectrum sunscreen, and most importantly, taking the time to apply, and reapply sunscreen properly, you can greatly curb your chances for sunburns and skin cancer.

Summer. Hair gets lighter. Water gets warmer. Drinks get colder. Music gets louder. Nights get longer. Life gets better. Enjoy every moment!

Have a healthy summer.

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