

A photograph of three women posing on a beach. They are wearing summer dresses and sunglasses. The woman on the left is in a white dress, the middle one in a yellow dress, and the right one in a white dress with a black belt. They are all smiling and have their arms raised in a celebratory gesture. The background is a bright, sunny beach scene with a large sun in the sky.

**SURPRISING WAYS
TO STAY SUN SAFE**

HELLO *Sunshine!*

All you need to know about the bottle that helps you soak up the sun.

BY MANAVI SIDDHANTI

It's that time of the year when you pull out your breezy summer shifts, broad-rimmed shades, flip-flops and sun block. The season demands that you shield your body from UV damage. The right kind of sunscreen helps you enjoy the sun without worrying about premature ageing, skin irritation and in some cases, skin cancer. While more of us are using sunscreens, most of us aren't sure exactly what protection they offer, and are cloudy about the technical terms on the labels. Here, we tell you all you need to know—from why you need to buy a new bottle every season to how to apply sunscreen for maximum protection.

Q What kind of damage can UV rays really cause to our skin?

Overexposure to sunlight without sunscreen can cause sunburns, discolouration and irritation. Even at low levels of exposure, UVA rays break down collagen causing wrinkles. UVB rays cause skin burn, darkening, irritation and in extreme cases, skin cancer. “I encounter a large number of patients complaining about irritation and sun aggravated skin disorders like miliaria, acne, rosacea and lupus,” says Dr Apratim Goel,

director, Goel's Cutis Clinic, Mumbai. Adds Dr Navin Taneja, director, National Skin Centre, Delhi, “UVB affects the top layers of the skin but the damage is principally due to the combined action of UVB and UVA rays.” Research shows that as many as 90% of skin cancers are caused due to UV radiation. But the good news is that skin cancer is not very common in India.

Q But we're dark-skinned, do we really need sunscreen?

The inherent colour and quality of our skin

offers us some amount of protection. “Our brown skins offer natural protection from the sun due to the higher melanin content which blocks the UV rays,” says Taneja. However we can all face skin damage such as sun spots, freckling and pigmentation. “People of all skin colours should use a sunscreen with SPF 15 and UVA coverage, when out in the sun,” he says. Choose a hydrating sunscreen lotion, so you don't need additional moisturising. Nowadays, many moisturisers and make-up base come with added SPF factor.

Q Does SPF determine my sunscreen's strength?

SPF (sun protection factor) evolved as a lab measure to test the effectiveness of a sunscreen. It refers to the sunscreen's ability to block out the sun's harmful UVB rays. SPF is also a measure of the length of time a product protects against skin reddening from UVB, compared to how long the skin takes to redden without protection. So if it takes 20

minutes to begin reddening, using an SPF 15 sunscreen theoretically prevents reddening 15 times longer (which is 300 minutes or five hours). While SPF measures the amount of UVB absorption, it is not the only thing to look for.

Q What is broad spectrum protection?

A sunscreen with broad spectrum protects against both UVB and UVA rays—the latter causes wrinkles and premature ageing. UVB rays (which can be tackled with SPF), are the cause of skin burn, irritation and skin cancer.

“A good broad-spectrum sunscreen should have an SPF 15 and contain avobenzene, titanium dioxide or zinc oxide,” advises Dr Chytra Anand, medical director, Kosmoderma Clinic, Bengaluru.

Q What is the difference between physical and chemical sunscreens?

Your jar of sunscreen contains organic and inorganic elements which absorb or reflect the UV rays and protect your skin. “A chemical sunscreen helps absorb UV radiation, making them less damaging,” explains Anand. These include ingredients like mexoryl, avobenzene, oxybenzone—which can cause irritations and allergies. Inorganic ingredients which don't absorb UV rays, reflect and scatter them away from our bodies. “Older formulations like zinc oxide are opaque,” explains Dr Jamuna Pai, cosmetic physician, Blush Clinics, Mumbai. Newer formulation of micronized titanium dioxide is not as opaque and provides excellent protection.

Q What is the right amount to apply?

A common mistake that everyone makes is applying too little sunscreen. It is recommended that you apply 5 to 6 tsp to cover the entire body. “Use a two-finger scoop of sunscreen on your face and neck every day no matter the weather,” advises Pai. It



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Trouble with the sun? Try this:

WHAT: **SUNTAN**

TRY: **Soon after a suntan, wash the exposed areas with lots of soap and water. Apply soothing moisturizer immediately.**

WHAT: **SUNBURN**

TRY: **In case of blistering and sunburn, soothing calamine lotion with menthol or peppermint can be used immediately.**



If you suspect that you're allergic to your sunscreen, visit a dermatologist who will do a patch allergy test, and avoid the ingredient.

days, you need as much protection from the UV rays in those seasons as in summer," says Anand.

Q Should a new tube of sunscreen be bought every year?

Although sunscreens are designed to remain stable for up to three years, if you're using it regularly, your bottle shouldn't last more than an year. Apply 5 to 6 tsp sunscreen over the body. Use the two-finger scoop formula for the neck and face. "Make sure you discontinue use once it expires," says Anand.

Q Does applying sunscreen limit your Vitamin D absorption?

"No sunscreen can block 100% of sunlight and it doesn't limit Vitamin D completely. However, usage of a high SPF sunscreen can cause a deficiency of Vitamin D," says Taneja. Your body gets Vitamin D only in two ways: it makes it with sunlight-on-skin and from food (especially fish such as salmon and egg yolk).

forms a layer around the skin and needs to be applied 30 minutes before stepping out in the sun.

SPF value. So, applying a sunscreen with SPF 15 twice won't change it to 30.

Q How often should it be re-applied?

Sunscreen needs to be re-applied within two to three hours. Regardless of claims by products, re-apply if you're sweating heavily or doing activity in the water. However, re-application doesn't change the product's

Q Should one apply a sunscreen on rainy days or while indoors?

UVA rays also pass through clouds and glass windows and can lead to skin irritation and darkening. "So though the sun seems less severe in winter and on rainy



TYPES OF SUNSCREEN

- People with oily skin or acne-prone skin should use a fluid-based, gel or gel-cream sunscreen. It should be non-comedogenic and non-greasy.
- Those who have dry skin should use thick creams or moisturiser based sunscreens which are more oily and greasy in nature.
- People with normal skin should use a balanced cream which is neither too greasy nor too runny.
- Sunscreens that are hypoallergenic, soothing, anti-irritant and non-perfumed in nature are best for those with sensitive skin.

Q What special care should one take when on vacation and outdoors?

While it's good to leave your troubles behind when on vacation, there should be an increased emphasis on sun protection. ■ Use a broad spectrum sunscreen every morning after bath, whether indoors or outdoors. Re-apply sunscreen every two to three hours.

- If you're heading to a beach or the poolside, use water resistant and sweat resistant sunscreens. "If you've just finished hiking in the mountains," advises Dr Sangeeta Amladi, head of medical services, Kaya Skin Clinic, "dip your hands and feet in lukewarm water for a thorough cleansing, then apply a moisturiser".
 - No sunscreen offers 100% protection. So, in addition to applying sunscreen, cover your skin. Whenever you are outside in the sun, carry an umbrella and always wear broad rimmed sunglasses.
 - Stay indoors when it's very hot and sunny, especially between 11 am and 3 pm.
 - In case you are allergic to sunscreens, consult a dermatologist. They may prescribe supplements with antioxidants which are good for your skin health.
- Go, be the sunshine girl! ☀

