About Sunscreen

Sun Protection Factor (SPF)

SPF stands for Sun Protection Factor. Sunscreens are rated by the strength of their SPF. The SPF number refers to the product's ability to screen or block out the sun's burning rays. SPF 15 sunscreens block 93% of UVB rays. SPF 30 and higher sunscreens block 97% of UVB rays.

Skin may still tan even when using sunscreen as all chemical sunscreens allow some UV rays to penetrate. If your skin does get wet from swimming or sweating, re-apply more sunscreen to make sure you are properly protected.

What's the difference between sunblock and sunscreen?

Sunblocks create a barrier that reflects UV light (examples are zinc, oxide, titanium dioxide).

Sunscreens absorb the UV rays and prevent penetration through the skin (examples are parsol, benzophenones).

Choosing sunscreen

- Sunscreens may be available with an SPF ranging from 2 to 60. The Canadian Dermatology Association and the Canadian Cancer Society recommend using an SPF of 15 or higher.
- If you have light-coloured skin, eyes and hair, or tend to burn, choose a sunscreen with a higher SPF. The more likely you are to burn, the higher the SPF you will need.
- Read the ingredients listed on the sunscreen label carefully. Make sure the product offers both UVA and UVB protection (usually labelled "broad-spectrum").
- Ensure the sunscreen is water resistant.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist for help when choosing a sunscreen.

When buying sunscreen, look for products with the Canadian Dermatology Association's logo.

Tips for using sunscreen

- Apply to clean, dry skin at least 20 minutes before you go out to allow the active ingredients to soak into your skin. Don't forget your ears, nose, neck and any bald spots, as these are areas where skin cancers most often occur.
- Your lips need protection too. Use an SPF 15 sunscreen lip balm and reapply when needed.
- Always use a generous amount.
- Reapply often (every 2 hours), especially after swimming or sweating.
- Don't forget to apply sunscreen on cloudy days and during the winter.
- If the first sunscreen you try isn't right for your skin, try other products until you find one that works for you.