

The basics of sunscreen



Submitted by the Canadian Dermatology Association

It's hot, sunny and you want to have a picnic: time to slap on the sunscreen. But how do you know what sunscreen to choose when there is an aisle-full in front of you?

One easy step is to look for the logo of the Canadian Dermatology Association (CDA) on the packaging; any sunscreens with the logo are part of the CDA's Sun Protection Program. To be added to this program, a sunscreen must:

- ✓ have an SPF of 30 or more
- ✓ be broad-spectrum, protecting against both UVA and UVB rays
- ✓ be non-comedogenic (meaning it won't clog pores)
- ✓ be minimally or non-fragranced


You also need to decide what type of sunscreen is best for you. There are a few things to consider here. First, do you want a chemical or physical sunscreen? Chemical sunscreens are issued a drug identification number (DIN) by Health Canada and are the most common sunscreens available at most retailers. Chemical sunscreens work by absorbing the sun's rays. Examples of filters in chemical sunscreens

are avobenzone, oxybenzone, ecamsule and octocrylene. Chemical sunscreens may be more irritating for some people. Physical sunscreens are issued a natural product number (NPN) by Health Canada and the main ingredients are zinc oxide and titanium dioxide. Physical sunscreens protect your skin from the sun by deflecting or blocking the sun's rays. Physical sunscreens can be thicker and more difficult to apply, or may leave white marks on the skin. Many sunscreens available today contain both chemical and physical filters.

The second thing to consider is the type of sunscreen product you need: a sport formula, sensitive formula or face formula; a spray, gel, cream or lotion. Whichever type of sunscreen product you choose, make sure you properly apply it and ensure even coverage for good protection. For instance, when using a spray sunscreen do not spray it on your face—instead, spray it onto your hands and then rub it on your face. This ensures the sunscreen does not get into the eyes (causing irritation) and that it is not inhaled. Some

new spray sunscreens even work upside down, so applying them evenly is much easier.

For people with contact allergies or sensitivities to certain ingredients, it is extremely important to review the ingredient list before using a new product. For example, if you are allergic to a certain preservative or to a fragrance, you will want to avoid a sunscreen containing either of those ingredients. Most products list all the ingredients on the bottle, but if you are ever uncertain then call the manufacturer. Most sunscreen manufacturers place a 1-800 number on their products for exactly that purpose.

Remember, sunscreen is only one element of proper sun protection. Good sun safety also includes wearing a wide-brimmed hat, 100 per cent UV-protective sunglasses, avoiding peak hours, seeking shade whenever possible and wearing loose-fitting, tightly woven long-sleeve shirts and pants. 

Looking for a little more?

Check the list: A list of sunscreens recognized by the CDA can be found on its website. Print off a copy and take it with you when shopping. www.dermatology.ca/sunscreens

Watch the CDA's sun safety videos: Tips on how to prevent skin cancer and what to look for. www.youtube.com/canadiandermatology

Visit Health Canada online:

- Sunscreen: Why it's important to protect yourself and your family, and how. <http://bit.ly/hc-sunscreen>
- Sunburn protectants: The differences between DIN and NPN sunscreens. <http://bit.ly/sunburnprotectants>

