

What You Need to Know About Sunscreens.

Shawn Allen, MD is a dermatologist and a skin cancer and cosmetic specialist in Boulder, Colorado. Here are some quick facts about sunscreens to help you make an informed choice when purchasing sun protection for you and your family. Please call the office if you have any further questions.

1. The rate of skin cancer is 30% higher in Colorado when compared to the rest of the U.S.
2. 80% of the sun's harmful rays (UVA) still penetrate the clouds on overcast days
3. UVA is a longer wavelength of light and penetrates car /home windows and goes deeper into the skin than UVB.
4. Both UVA and UVB wavelengths of light cause skin cancer- SPF ratings only address UVB protection and do not address UVA protection! Currently, there are no ratings available for UVA.
5. Both UVA and UVB cause skin cancer and UVA causes premature aging of skin.
6. The FDA has accepted a new proposal for testing of UVA protection that will result in a 4 star rating on labels to help the consumer better understand the UVA protection. Not here yet!
7. Most people put on too little sunscreen (studies have shown we apply ½ the amount that was tested for the SPF ratings, therefore you are usually only getting half the SPF rating indicated.)
8. Every 1000ft of elevation increases sun intensity by 10-15%.
9. Many skin cancers are a result from sun exposure/burns during childhood, but daily exposure contributes greatly to the development of skin cancer and aging.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- A. Not all Sunscreens are the same, the best choice is a sunscreen containing **Physical** sunscreen, the best of which is Zinc Oxide. *Look for the following highlighted ingredients on your bottle.*
 - a. Physical Sunscreen (harder to find, many choices available thru Dr offices)
 - i. **Zinc Oxide - Best, look for 3% or higher- ideal is 6-9%**
 - ii. Titanium Dioxide
 - b. Chemical sunscreen- second best choice
 - i. **3% Avobenzone - Best in the chemical category but is unstable in sunlight!**
 - ii. Everything else
- B. For athletes look for "sweat/water resistant" labeling to minimize eye irritation and look for chemical free products that have Zinc or Titanium only
- C. You want to apply liberally and at least 20-30 minutes BEFORE exposure to sun. Reapply every 2 hours!
- D. Try to avoid the sun during peak hours : 10am – 4pm (When your shadow is shorter than you)
- E. Follow sun-protection behaviors: Wear broad-brimmed hats (4 inches), sunglasses that block UV, protective clothing (UPF 50), seek shade, wear sunscreens with zinc oxide and SPF 30+.