

How to Apply Sunscreen

It is important to apply sunscreen properly in order to get the adequate protection from the sun's UV rays as intended from the product and reduce your risk of sunburn, aging, and skin cancer. Follow these steps from board-certified dermatologists:

1. *What sunscreen do I use?* Choose a sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher that is broad spectrum. If you plan to be sweaty or wet, choose a sunscreen that is "water-resistant". Sunscreens containing zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide are good choices for children. Sunscreen sticks are great for the face of children or people who anticipate sweating a lot. Make sure your sunscreen is not expired. See "How to choose a sunscreen" for more information.
2. *When do I need sunscreen?* UV radiation from the sun is strongest between the hours of 10am and 4pm. Sunscreen should be applied to exposed skin during that time if you plan to be outside. Individuals with significant and prolonged sun exposure after 4pm may also want to consider using sunscreen then as well. You even need sunscreen on a cloudy day as the clouds only filter out a fraction of the UV rays.
3. *How do I apply sunscreen?* Apply a generous layer of sunscreen to all exposed, bare skin. Rub the sunscreen in thoroughly and evenly. It takes approximately one ounce of sunscreen to cover an adult's body. Don't forget the part in your hair, your ears, your neck, and the tops of your hands and feet! Also protect your lips by applying sunscreen or a lip product with sunscreen to your lips. To allow adequate time to apply the sunscreen, you should try to apply 15 minutes prior to sun exposure.
4. *How do I apply a spray sunscreen?* If applying an aerosol or spray sunscreen, make sure to rub the sunscreen in to get adequate coverage of skin. Do not spray sunscreen directly on the face. If using a sunscreen spray, spray a small amount onto the hands and then rub on the facial skin. When using a sunscreen spray, apply the spray sunscreen outdoors or in an adequately ventilated area. Do not inhale the sunscreen spray.
5. *Do I need to reapply sunscreen?* Yes! Sunscreen should be reapplied every 2 hours when you have sun exposure. If you are swimming or sweating, you should choose a sunscreen that is water- and sweat-resistant. If you choose a sunscreen that is "water- and sweat-resistant 40 minutes", you should reapply that sunscreen after 40 minutes of swimming/sweating. If you choose a sunscreen that is "water- and sweat-resistant 80 minutes", you should reapply that sunscreen after 80 minutes of swimming/sweating. You should also reapply sunscreen after swimming or toweling off.
6. *What are other ways I can protect my skin from harmful UV rays?* Wide-brimmed hats, sunglasses, and sun protective clothing (such as long sleeves and rash guards) also protect your skin from the sun. You can also seek shade, especially between 10am and 4pm when the UV radiation is at its peak. Also avoid tanning beds as UV radiation from tanning beds also damages skin and can cause skin cancer.

For more information on how to protect your skin and reduce your risk of skin cancer, see a board-certified dermatologist.

Updated April 23, 2018