

# WELLNESS CONNECTION

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## GOOD DECISIONS - Sunscreen Safety



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Too often, protecting your skin from the harsh summer sun is an afterthought. Once you're in the safety of shade and you've suffered a sunburn, the damage to your skin has been done. Getting in a habit of providing sun protection for your skin, will not only prevent sunburns but also improve your long-term skin health. Even if you're already an avid skin protector, you may have some misconceptions about skin safety when it comes to the sun.

Here are a few common misconceptions regarding UV safety:

**Sunscreen application.** Sunscreen should be applied at least 15 minutes prior to sun exposure. This allows the skin to absorb the product, giving you the maximum benefit. Sunscreen should also be applied from head to toe with enough product to fill a shot glass (approx. 1 ounce).

**Storing sunscreen.** Never leave your container of sunscreen on your pool chair, towel, or anywhere else it can be exposed to the sun. If you've got access to a cooler, try storing your sunscreen inside for a cooling effect and maximum protection from UV rays.

**Water resistant.** No sunscreen is waterproof! All sunscreen comes off with water or sweat. Sunscreens labeled "water resistant" are required to be tested according to the required SPF test procedure. The labels are required to state whether the sunscreen remains effective for 40 minutes or 80 minutes when swimming or sweating, and all sunscreens must provide directions on when to reapply.

**Sunscreen lingo.** Understanding the terminology used on sunscreen labels is important. Here are a few common ones:

- **Broad Spectrum:** Broad spectrum sunscreen provides protection from the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation. There are two types of UV radiation that you need to protect yourself from – UVA and UVB. Broad spectrum provides protection against both by providing a chemical barrier that absorbs or reflects UV radiation before it can damage the skin.
- **Sun Protection Factor (SPF):** The SPF value indicates the level of sunburn protection provided by the sunscreen product. Higher SPF values will provide greater sunburn protection. However, SPF is **not** directly related to time of solar exposure (SPF 15 does not equal 15 hours of sun protection) but to amount of solar exposure.

**Expiration dates.** Just like all other products, sunscreen products have expiration dates. It's important to check these dates to ensure that your sunscreen products are providing the benefits you expect them to. If there is no expiration date on your sunscreen, the product should remain stable for around three years. The product should be discarded if you're unsure of the time of purchase as its effectiveness can't be guaranteed.

Think you're well versed in sunscreen safety? Test your knowledge by taking the FDA's [Sunscreen Quiz](#)! For more information on sunscreen safety, you can visit the [US Food and Drug Administration's website](#) where the content for this article was obtained from. As always, you should consult with a trusted medical professional for specific guidance on sun safety.

